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Black Masculinities as Marronage: Claude McKay's Representation of Black Male Subjectivities in Metropolitan Spaces

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Black Masculinities as Marronage: Claude McKay's Representations of Black Male
Subjectivities in Metropolitan Spaces

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APPROVAL PAGE

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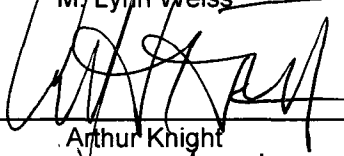


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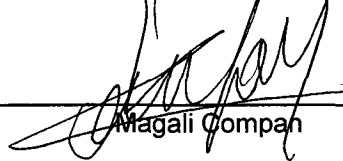
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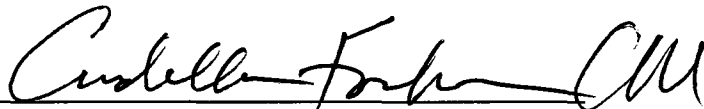
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ABSTRACT PAGE

This dissertation explores the representation of black masculinities in Claude McKay's novels, *Home to Harlem* (1928), *Banjo* (1929) and *Banana Bottom* (1933). I use the trope of marronage to theorize McKay's representations of black male subjectivities across a range of African diasporan spaces in the Caribbean, the USA and Europe, arguing that McKay's male characters negotiate these diasporan spaces with the complex consciousness and proclivities of maroons. I then examine the ways in which careful attention to the migration and settlement in various diasporan spaces of McKay's black male characters exposes some critical manifestations that profoundly alter how we think about the formation of black male subjectivities. McKay's representations predate by more than sixty years the present currency of difference, hybridity and multiplicity in postmodernist and postcolonial discourse, yet almost throughout the entire 20th century his work was not recognized in this context either in the USA or the Caribbean, both places where he has some degree of iconic stature. In fact, the maroon consciousness of McKay's men produces new insights on the issues of cosmopolitanism, race, nation, and migration in terms of how these affect black male subjectivity but more so how black male subjectivities work upon these concepts to expand their definitions and produce particular kinds of diasporan masculinity. Through the trope of marronage, the project will demonstrate how McKay's male characters use their maroon conditions to map, explore and define a black diasporan experience – one, moreover, that is shaped by “creolizations” – the various pushes and pulls of multiple forms of psychological and cultural crossover.

The Introduction places marronage in its historical and cultural contexts and defines who the Maroons were and what particular characteristics managed their existence. The trope of marronage, as an organizing frame for McKay's texts, is intricately tied to the understanding of how “creolization,” a term that is integrally associated with the Caribbean experience of hybridity, as both an experience and a concept, structures McKay's sensibility and representations. Marronage and creolization are integral in understanding the range of black male subjectivities that performed under the umbrella of class, race, nation and gender, even as those same performances were producing, underground as it were, “other” narratives about black identity and migration during the 1920s-30s, the period in which McKay wrote. Furthermore, the term “subjectivities” rather than “identity” or the singular form, “subjectivity” merges so as to give texture and form to the ambiguities that abound in McKay's representation of the individual and collective experience of the characters in his novels.

Chapter One offers an interpretation of *Home to Harlem* as a narrative in which black masculinity is as much a subjectivity driven by the search for home as it is itinerancy. Chapter Two seeks to analyze McKay's *Banjo or a Story without a Plot*, through an examination of the protagonist Banjo, to see how his migrant or vagabond characters live as cosmopolites in Marseilles' metissage inclined port city. Finally, Chapter Three proposes to examine how *Banana Bottom's* Bitia Plant represents a “masked” McKay, or McKay in drag, looking critically at a colonial Jamaica that restricted her/him with certain conservative ideas but which still appeals to McKay artistically because of its rich pastoral sensibilities.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother who fathered me. It is also for my grandmother and all the women whose masculinity and femininity have shaped me.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

During the process of writing this dissertation my father and one of my inspirations, Barry Chevannes, would say to me, “If yuh want good, yuh nose haffi run.” This popular Jamaican proverb describes the demands on one’s life that can come from an attempt to accomplish or achieve an ambitious goal. My dad’s words were a constant reminder that taking risks, intellectual or other, and seeking to triumph over the many challenges that a project like this one presents, might have discomforts that I must endure respectfully. In fact, these are the words that led me to make difficult decisions to travel away from the College of William and Mary, first to Pennsylvania and then to cold, cold Maine to pursue ways to sustain this “good.” Needless to say, I always had a “running nose.”

I am therefore grateful to those family, friends, and mentors who nurtured this “good.” Bowdoin College awarded me a Dissertation Fellowship to complete this project and it was while here that the bulk of this dissertation took shape and developed into a confident thesis. The College’s funding made it possible for me to gain access to McKay’s papers archived in the Beinecke Library at Yale University. I am also grateful to those colleagues in the English Department at Bowdoin College, Mary Agnes, Elizabeth Muther, and David Collings especially, who took the time to mentor, read, edit and discuss different unrefined parts of this project. David Collings went out of his way to read McKay’s novels, discuss them with me and ultimately tease out some refreshing and productive theoretical grounds for analyzing McKay’s fiction using the conceptual frames of masculinity and marronage to analyze McKay’s texts. To my brother and friend, Olufemi Vaughan, Director of the Africana Studies Program, Bowdoin College,

whose Political Science background pushed me to think more “ambidextrously” about my conclusions about the African Diaspora, masculinity and marronage, especially during the interwar period.

I am also indebted Jean-Max Guieu, Department of French, Georgetown University, for the invaluable resources he provided on the material culture and social history of Marseille. I am thankful for his translations of McKay’s *Banjo* and other secondary material from French and for his unwavering support and friendship throughout this journey. I am immensely grateful to Drs. Michael Bucknor, Department of Literatures in English, the University of the West Indies, Mona campus and Curdella Forbes, English Department, Howard University, Washington D.C. Their belief in this project from its very inception gave me the strength to survive away from William and Mary. Their mentoring demanded an intellectual rigor and suppleness that did “my nose run” and kept this “good” in my sights. To the late Professor Rex Nettleford, for his letters from the Diaspora and for any clippings on Caribbean masculinity. I am blessed to have had his love and support. Thanks to my Director Lynn Weiss for her patience and dedication in dealing with a “maroon-like.” I could not have achieved this “good” without her generosity of spirit and commitment. Thanks to my dissertation buddy and friend, Ray Black for the companionship and for sharing your beautiful daughter’s smiles at all hours of the night or day. Thanks to my family and friends, those here and those in Jamaica for bolstering my courage to keep working for this “good.” I am blessed to have friends in you Jane and Sam Nesbitt, Joseph DeLois, Annette Leyow, Coleridge Barnett, Ella Diaz and Mark D’Alessandro.

Introduction : An Examination of Marronage

My dissertation examines the representation of male characters in Claude McKay's novels, *Home to Harlem* (1928), *Banjo* (1929) and *Banana Bottom* (1933). I use the trope of marronage to theorize McKay's representation of black male subjectivities across a range of African diasporan spaces in the Caribbean, the USA and Europe, arguing that McKay's male characters negotiate these diasporan spaces with the complex consciousness and proclivities of maroons. By employing the trope of marronage, I examine the ways in which careful attention to the migration and settlement in various diasporan spaces of McKay's black male characters exposes some critical manifestations that profoundly alter how we think about the formation of black male subjectivities. The maroon consciousness of McKay's men produces new insights on the issues of cosmopolitanism, race, nation, and migration in terms of how these affect black male subjectivity but *moreso* how black male subjectivities work upon these concepts to expand their definitions and produce particular kinds of diasporan masculinity.

By employing the trope of marronage, the project will demonstrate how McKay's male characters use their maroon conditions to map, explore and define a black diasporan experience – one, moreover, that is shaped by the various pushes and pulls of multiple forms of psychological and cultural crossover. For reasons that I discuss below, I specifically refer to such crossovers as “creolizations,” eschewing the more popular postcolonial term “hybridity.” McKay's representations predate by more than sixty years, the present currency of difference, hybridity and multiplicity in postmodernist and postcolonial discourse, yet almost throughout the entire 20th century his work was not

recognized in this context either in the USA or the Caribbean, both places where he has some degree of iconic stature. Indeed, this stature has been largely symbolic, related in the USA mainly to his role in the Harlem Renaissance and the Négritude Movement and the popularization of his famous poem on the Red October race riots, “If We Must Die,” when it was supposedly appropriated by Winston Churchill as a rallying cry to enlist American aid in World War II. In France, he is venerated for the preservation of a history of pre-war Marseilles culture through his novel *Banjo*, one of the few representations through which the cityscape could be re/membered after Adolf Hitler razed “The Quartier Réservé” or “The Ditch” in World War II. The Caribbean recognizes McKay as a trailblazer for the West Indian novel,¹ and situates him within the exile paradigm of reading Caribbean migrant literature that was prevalent through seven decades of the 20th century. Yet by and large not much critical work was done on McKay’s literary oeuvre, especially relative to his large symbolic stature.

The increase in critical interest in McKay as a scholar and a writer can be seen in the recent publications which address McKay. Such texts as Brent Hayes Edwards’ *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (2003); Gary Holcomb’s *Claude McKay Code Name Sasha: Queer Black Marxism and the Harlem Renaissance*, (2007); Kotti Sree Ramesh and Kandula Nirupa Rani’s *Claude McKay: The Literary Identity from Jamaica to Harlem and Beyond* (2006); Josh Goschiak’s *The Shadowed Country: Claude McKay and the Romance of the Victorians* (2006); Michelle Ann Stephens’ *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914-1962* (2005), Winston James’ scholarship, especially *A Fierce Hatred of Injustice: Claude McKay’s Jamaica and his*

¹See Kenneth Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel and Its Background*

Poetry of Rebellion (2000), Heather Hathaway's *Caribbean Waves: Relocating Claude McKay and Paule Marshall*; Tyrone Tillery's *Claude McKay: A Black Poet's Struggle for Identity* (1992), and Michel Fabre's *From Harlem to Paris: Black American Writers in France, 1840 – 1980* (1991) have emerged to place McKay at the center of literary and cultural studies discourse but more important as a writer whose works invite provocative and productive discussions around migration, travel, and diaspora. These studies have variously addressed such issues as McKay's Pan Africanist political activism, Garveyism, colonial insurgency and its relationship to black metropolitanism; queer sexuality in a context of transnationality and its threat to the nation state; McKay's contribution to "the practice of diaspora" (Brent Hayes Edwards) as a form of black internationalism; and McKay's deployment of vagabondage as a "new" category of travel in the conception of diaspora.

Michelle Stephens in a chapter of *Black Empire*: "Nationality Doubtful and *Banjo*'s Crew in Marseilles," addresses the issue of masculinity in McKay's novel *Banjo*. Heather Hathaway and Winston James' studies stand out as an unusual attempt in US-based scholarship to situate McKay within his Caribbean critical and cultural locations. However, no comprehensive study of McKay's treatment of gender exists, and outside of the work by Caribbean scholars, focus on the Caribbean presence in McKay's work is limited. My project expands and nuances the existing discourse by showing how McKay's treatment of masculinity can be understood only in the context of his Caribbean cultural, political, historical and literary experience. I place my study as a timely and strategic political intervention into the present discourse where the Caribbean has been marginalized in the kinds of theorization applied to its literary products abroad. As

“Caribbean” has been subsumed within diasporan discourse, the region has been downplayed in its presence and positionality as a real place that shapes the discourse, aesthetics and literary imagination of its writers and the cosmopolitanism of its migrant citizens.

The concepts of marronage, which I deploy in this study, and vagabondage referred to above (which McKay himself theorizes in the novel *Banjo*), have particular epistemological meanings and philosophical provenance in Caribbean folk culture. Creolization, a concept I bring into conversation with marronage, represents a long tradition among Caribbean theorists to find a vocabulary adequate to describe the complex heterogeneity (and, indeed, postmodernity) that characterizes Caribbean cultural life, intellectual thought and literary expression. These two concepts come together in my study to articulate the grounds of McKay’s multiple, varied, contradictory and expansive treatment of black male subjectivity.

Marronage and creolization are integral in understanding the range of black male subjectivities that performed under the umbrella of class, race, nation and gender even as those same performances were producing, underground as it were, “other” narratives about black identity and migration during the 1920s-30s, the period in which McKay wrote. These “other” narratives were in fact completely different from the dominant paradigms of race, nation, class and gender, and were effecting what Kamau Brathwaite’s calls a *submarine* displacement of these terms or the way they were understood. McKay’s male characters in *Banjo* and *Home to Harlem*, as well as what I will argue (in Chapter Four) is his disguised male protagonist, Bitá Plant,² in *Banana Bottom* capture the

² See chapter four where I discuss McKay as returning to Jamaica in literary drag. I argue that *Banana Bottom* is a return narrative in which McKay “disguises” himself as the female character Bitá Plant.

survival acts of Caribbean black men in a hostile white world in ways that illustrate their masquerading, displacement and supplanting of the above traditional concepts of identity. These survival acts are methods of self-fashioning in the context of an ethic of resistance. The paradox of such acts is that they are based on deliberate migration to and through various metropolitan spaces, building black communities in the very spaces that necessitate resistance in the first place.

Indeed, McKay's novels capture the fullest range of the paradoxical complications of diasporan black male subjectivities: contradictions, idiosyncrasies, hybrid inventions, collusive resistances, oppositional negotiations, self-referential replies to imperialism and colonialism. This hybrid presentation departs from the fixed and monolithic categorization of blackness that prevails in black diaspora discourse. My project seeks to foreground and theorize some of the generally downplayed or ignored contexts of black male characterizations in twentieth century fiction, with specific reference to McKay's novels. My discussion troubles the tendency in African diaspora discourse to present internationalism, transnationality and cosmopolitanism as experiences and conditions that are produced within diasporan metropolitan space. I place against this tendency the existence and implications of politics and subjectivities formed in localities outside this space yet working to shape the face of transnationality and internationalism. Further, I go against the grain of current discourse by showing internationalism and transnationality as contingent and provisional rather than fixed or accomplished, and as modes of tension rather than spaces of achieved accommodation.

In chapter two of this project, I offer an interpretation of *Home to Harlem* as a narrative in which black masculinity is as much a subjectivity driven by the search for

home as it is itinerancy. The chapter seeks to map out what Clifford James describes as “a practice of dwelling (differently), as an ambivalent refusal or indefinite deferral of return” (James 269). Through the character of Jake and his sidekick Ray, this ambivalence is realized as a maroon condition in the negotiation of Harlem’s diasporic community. The chapter examines, through these two characters, some of the tensions inherent in Harlem life in the manner in which it emerges as a burgeoning African diasporic space. I argue that Harlem may be seen as a maroon enclave where *other* kinds of resistances, psychological, social, cultural are taking place. These forms of resistances make Harlem for Jake and Ray an important geopolitical space that signifies upon the various means through which the “maroon” creates a community by both inhabiting and leaving a space.

Chapter three seeks to unpack McKay’s *Banjo or a Story without a Plot*, to see how his migrant or vagabond characters live as cosmopolites in Marseilles’ polyglot port city. Through an examination of the protagonist Banjo, a drifter among several other drifters panhandling amidst the chaos of a very “international” crowd and competing against each other for spoils and scarce benefits, I argue that the subjectivity of cosmopolitanism provide him the opportunity to create a thriving public sphere. This is a sphere wherein the political, racial, and social debates produce alternative and problematic ways of imagining internationalism as a precursor to diaspora. The chapter aims to show how Banjo and his drifter crew symbolize the foundation for the politics and sentiments of the Négritude Movement that followed the Harlem Renaissance. I aim to show how, as maroons, these men use the guerrilla tactic of the powerful Akan/Caribbean trickster symbol, Anansi, to employ the knowledge of their bodies to

“[re]enact their own exclusion, by tracing circles of interpretation, which shut [them] out” (Boehmer, 163). In this way they signify on their “nigger” subjectivity and play on their abject states to create spaces of freedom and agency; and this is similar to the slave who would say “yes massah” but would be ironically masking his resistance.

In Chapter four, I examine how *Banana Bottom's* Bitia Plant represents a “masked” McKay, or McKay in drag, looking critically at a colonial Jamaica that restricts him with certain conservative ideas but which still calls him artistically because of its rich pastoral sensibilities. While the dissertation addresses autobiographical issues in all three novels, it is in this chapter that I isolate this factor for an in-depth discussion. *Banana Bottom* more than any of the other novels seems representative of the autobiographical impulse in McKay’s artistic imagination. It is curious that McKay chooses to introduce a female protagonist in his third novel when in his previous two novels and even in his collections of short stories his protagonists are mostly men. What is at stake in this construction and how does this affect (t)his masculine project? In this chapter, I explore how McKay reiterates his maroon subjectivity, in the form of a woman, in an attempt to explore masculine domesticity within a Caribbean context. I posit that McKay’s masked gender-bending in this novel appears as a function of creolization. It is my argument that McKay writes this novel around the issues of sex, sexuality and religion precisely because he wants to engage the ways in which the Caribbean male identifies (with) the Caribbean female in the domestic spaces of home, work, play, and church. One must bear in mind that McKay sees himself as a vagabond artist who holds no allegiance to any one nation, influence or identity, and thus, it is necessary to examine the nature of the “vagabond” existence as a mode of rebellion that is translated in Bitia Plant’s sexuality as

well as the sexualities of strategic male characters. My discussion also takes note of the oppositions the novel sets up and problematizes between geographical and geopolitical spaces (town, country and foreign – in this case England) and the ways each of these spaces affects the imagination and performance of maroon masculine subjectivities but cannot erase a fundamental sense of self that plays in and out of the contingencies of performance.

Finally, my discussion shows how McKay's novelistic style is an integral treatment of his discourse on maroon subjectivity. Each novel has its own style – *Home to Harlem* with its transient, cinematographic rolling plot-line, *Banjo* with its fragmented, busy, “postmodern” structure; and *Banana Bottom* with its layered pastoral dialogic – and each offers an alternative cultural view of the black community and how it can operate as a “voice from below” producing visual art, literature, music, and community that is practiced in the “souls of black folk.” For it is here, in “the lower frequency” – to echo Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man*, that one sees evidences of McKay's visions and versions of manliness, because these subjectivities are at “play” in a manner reminiscent of a jazz ensemble. And even though these subjectivities are competitive in style and form (performance rituals), they are loose and related at the same time. Therefore, I argue that McKay's novels and his characters expose the dualities and ambiguities that abound in and are absorbed in the performance of black subjectivity and indeed the black diasporan community.

An Examination of Marronage

The Caribbean writer George Lamming presents the theme of his seminal work, *The Pleasures of Exile*, as “the migration of the writer from the Caribbean to the dubious refuge of a metropolitan culture” (22). Lamming’s statement with its implication of flight from a precarious space to a freedom that may be equally precarious, begins to invoke, for the reader, some aspects of the concept of marronage, including the complexity it brings to the concepts of internationalism and transnationality. In his reference to the migration acts and patterns of Caribbean subjects, Lamming’s work brings into focus the maroon trope of flight in Caribbean life, history and culture. This concept of marronage has occupied the imagination of such writers and thinkers as Nobel laureates Derek Walcott and V.S. Naipaul, historian and cultural critic Rex Nettleford, novelist Jamaica Kincaid, and Jamaican vernacular poet Louise Bennett, among others.

These writers’ attention to the marronage trope re-imagines (and thus remaps) the event of European contact and its productions and consequences, including the subsequent colonization and decimation of indigenous Amerindian peoples and cultures, the introduction of slavery into the Americas, and the politics of a postcolonial memory. That contact and these consequences laid the foundations for the experience and being of the maroon in the Americas. Here, I use the term “maroon” not in the same historico-cultural way it is used by Anthropologists or historians in the past. I am extrapolating from the manner, style, technology, and meaning of the historical Maroons and applying a conceptualization of these factors to my reading of the actions of the mostly working class male characters in McKay’s novels. Thus, I write the term as “maroon” and not

“Maroon.” The presence of the maroon paradigm in the Americas calls into being a variety of motifs of deception, subterfuge, poisoning, uprising, heroism, magic (such as obeah) and engages marvelous realist narrative forms of expression. But it is through the acts of escape, migration, or flight that these other motifs are contoured.

Marronage is of course associated with fugitive slaves who fled the plantations in the New World and the word “maroon” has significance in North and South America and the Caribbean (Campbell 1). It identifies the Seminole Indians in Florida and the Dismal Swamps of Virginia and North Carolina; the Saramakans, Ndyukas and four other tribes in the Suriname forests; the Maroons in Jamaica and other Caribbean countries; and the Quilombos in Brazil. Some critics suggest that the term “Maroon” came into use in the Caribbean under the British around 1655. Also, Kofi Agorsah suggests that “evidences available on the Maroons indicate that the term does not apply only to individuals, communities, or groups of people of African descent” (quoted in James, 11). The word was also later assigned to “to Amer-Indian slaves who had escaped from the Spanish” (Agorsah 32; quoted in James, 11). The etymology of the word is uncertain but the general claim is that it derives from the Spanish “cimarron” which originally described “domestic cattle that had escaped to a wild existence” (Campbell 1). However, the term lost its “faunal connotation” (Campbell 1) and came to describe the fugitive existence of runaway slaves almost exclusively.

Marronage is the “process of flight by slaves from servitude to establish their own collective agencies in inhospitable areas” (Campbell 1). This removal from the mainstream into a less “civilized” life is another kind of isolation that is about physical and psychological withdrawal from the plantation by the slave to find a space of

resistance, endurance or survival. Withdrawal, therefore, does not mean weakness or helplessness and does not project a subjectivity of resignation. However, the history of marronage indicates that “flight” or “fugitive” is scarcely adequate to describe the practice or the subjectivities of marronage.

Indeed, marronage demonstrates the cunning of the slave and his/her intent to carry out a range of political insurrections both internally and externally so as to diminish and eradicate the inhumanity slavery inflicted upon Africans. Even though Maroons would run away from the plantations they would “home” or nestle close to the plantations to keep in communication with friends and family. The proximity to the plantation, even after a rejection of it, gave the maroons insight into the workings of the plantation system so that they could avoid capture but also lure other slaves as well as plan and orchestrate sabotage and uprisings. Maroons greatly depreciated the plantation economy by preying on the plantations they deserted, stealing livestock and horses or killing or maiming them on the spot while helping themselves to ammunition and other military accoutrements (Campbell 6). In addition, Maroons deterred colonial landowners, even those with land titles, from settling or parceling out arable land because in some islands Maroons lived very close to some of the best agricultural land (Campbell 6). As a result many planters abandoned the islands because their profits declined and some were ruined materially and financially.

Like the American Indians of North America, Maroons waged guerrilla warfare on the plantation system and not only disrupted its economy and society but also challenged its very foundations. Guerilla warfare, the struggle of the weak against the strong, uses as its *modus operandi* “surprise attack and retreat and ingenious ambushes,

thereby avoiding direct confrontations” (Campbell 2). Maroons came to represent a “militant slave consciousness” (Price 2) that birthed a new non-slave self that rejected both the condition and identity of inhumanity. This new non-slave self is the critical acting subject who liberates him/herself and others. Interestingly, this characteristic has helped to historicize the maroon figure in the Americas as simply as a “venerated hero, warrior, and ancestral figure” (James 8). Yet, it is problematic to describe the maroon as heroic because the maroon figure in history possesses a paradoxical and a puzzling subjectivity in his relationship with slavery. Thus, any attempts to theorize marronage and the heroism associated with it must take into such theorization the consideration that the maroon subjectivity is not singular or monolithic.

It should be noted here that there are two kinds of maroon. There are those who lived as isolates, (described as runaways in the United States) such as Esteban Montejo in Miguel Barnett’s *Autobiography of a Runaway Slave* (1968). A maroon like Esteban Montejo who would remain close to the plantation would often avoid contact with other runaways and would despise the latter’s actions because they feared these actions would lead to their discovery. There is also the Mackandal type: Mackandal, a historical figure written about in Alejo Carpentier’s *The Kingdom of This World* and immortalized in Haitian legend, formed alternative and underground communities in the mountains and forests. This second type of maroon who lived in the mountains and who created their own communities (notably in Jamaica, McKay’s birthplace), in some instances, retained complex and ambivalent relations with both the planters and slaves on the plantation. They would collude with the plantation owners to capture, subdue and return other runaways as a condition of their own survival, in order to protect their own secret

hideaways and maintain their own freedoms. This ambiguous relationship between maroons and the very plantation that they had abandoned was forged by both the military and the colonial governments with the maroons in order to keep the latter at bay, especially because the maroons understood and could put the physical terrain of the mountains and forests to better militaristic use than these adversaries could. Terrain was especially important for runaway slaves (isolates) in places like Jamaica because the abundance of high ground and tree cover allowed these isolates to live and move in and out of their hiding places without being easily discovered. Thus, planters were aware that if the plantation system were to survive, a necessary collusion had to be had with these runaways. As a result, [maroon] treaties were signed between the English and the runaways in Jamaica and independent maroon communities were born and exist to this day.

These manifestations attest to the range of possibilities in the maroon figure and emphasize the ambiguity in the relationship between these fugitive slaves and other slaves and also with their oppressors. All of this shows complexities, contradictions, paradoxes, and powers that have been of crucial importance to the Caribbean theorization of the concept of marronage, and will play a major part in my conceptualization of black male marronage in metropolitan and Caribbean locations in McKay's novels.

Kamua Brathwaite in *Contradictory Omens*, his seminal text on Caribbean cultural diversity, uses marronage as one of the multiple tropes through which he traces the complexity of the Caribbean as a creolized society forged out of multifarious historical experiences that included slavery, resistance, uprising and forced subterranean strategies of survival in the face of attempts at cultural genocide. In a later essay, "The

African Presence in Caribbean Literature” Brathwaite discusses marronage as both a literary and a wider cultural practice in the Caribbean, linking it, not just to the literal maroons, but also to the way Caribbean people throughout the colonial period resisted the plantations’ efforts to keep them down. He also links the term to a number of qualities: psychological space, subterfuge; subterranean/submarine assertion of African being, improvisation, and transverse or crabwise movement. All of these are associated with guerrilla or trickster tactics that are not easily decipherable by the “eye” used to reading(s) in linear trajectories or epistemologies of fixity. Therefore, marronage revokes the binarism between order and disorder, form and absence of form. Brathwaite’s propositions were later explored by other scholars such as Barbara Lalla in *Defining Jamaican Fiction: Marronage and the Discourse of Survival* (1996), Cynthia James in *The Maroon Narrative: Caribbean Literature in English across Boundaries, Ethnicities, and Centuries* (2002).

Lalla argues that in Jamaican literature, the maroon figure has critical and linguistic significance for understanding and analyzing Jamaican fiction and also for distinguishing “a national fiction within a Caribbean aesthetic” (4). What Lalla does in this work is to show how in selected Jamaican literature the attributes of marronage, what she describes as “withdrawal, displacement, exile, and isolation on the one hand and resistance, endurance, and survival and the other” (Lalla 2), shed light on the theme of distance – psychological, temporal, and physical – in defining Jamaican literature. Lalla identifies marronage as a critical trope for understanding the body of work within Jamaican and Caribbean fiction that focuses on resistance in Caribbean socio-historical and literary experiences. Lalla’s concern is with how the themes of alienation and

distance, attributes of marronage, further an analysis of marronage as a psychological and linguistic discourse in Caribbean literary culture. And even though Lalla's focus is on Jamaican fiction, she fails to consider Claude McKay's fiction, even as she echoes Kenneth Ramchand's statement that "Banana Bottom is the first substantial novel about West Indian folk experience and the first novel to contain "an achieved West Indian heroine" (Lalla 10). The omission is somewhat surprising, given that this novel is about resistance and its heroine, Bitia Plant, is a prime example for study of the "self in marronage" – a deliberate re-articulation and demonstration of the "no longer submerged self"³ against reigning stereotypes about gender, sexuality, race and class. Indeed, Lalla failed to see the usefulness of McKay's fiction alongside the postcolonial⁴ works of Erna Brodber, John Hearne and Anthony Winkler, or Olive Senior in delineating an even more nuanced study of the "psychological, spatio-temporal and ideological orientations and dimensions" of "the maroon as a character type in creative literature" (5).

Cynthia James's text builds on Lalla's ideas and provides an invigorating analysis of Caribbean fiction from as early as the 17th century by demonstrating how marronage provides a useful paradigm for thinking about the development of Caribbean literature. James complicates the notion of marronage beyond its cultural and historical meaning in the Caribbean and in Caribbean literature and argues that the maroon paradigm in its present use and function in Caribbean literature is limited because of its Afro-centered focus in the discourse on flight, resistance and survival. James characterizes the maroon

³ This term is credited to Edward Kamau Brathwaite, who coined both [the "self in marronage" and the related term the "submerged self." Both of these terms are crucial to my study of marronage and are discussed later in this chapter.

⁴ Postcolonial in this sense echoes both Edward Said's and Homi K. Bhabha's definitions which critique the myths and false images that have been invented and used by the West to justify their attempts to misrepresent and exploit those cultures and peoples that have come under the influence of colonial Europe.

outside of race as a “buccaneer,” a pirate, hermit, exile (literary and other) and thus complicates the meaning of maroon within the Caribbean by asking questions about home, belonging and identity. One interesting question that arises out of her discussion is the place of the “white European” in the conceptualization of marronage.

My analysis builds on these two important texts in terms of pushing marronage beyond its application to a particular group or location. McKay’s work, by its simultaneously Caribbean and pan-diasporan contexts, allows me to move beyond the Caribbean to the African diaspora and use marronage as a frame for explaining Caribbean and African diasporic cultural identity politics as they are played out by his black male characters. However, my analysis of McKay’s texts goes beyond a discussion of the flight, survival and resistance of his male characters. While I build upon the work of both Lalla and James, I want as well to examine marronage as an inherently creolizing process, particularly as it is played out in McKay’s novelistic treatment of black masculinities.

My discussion of the trope of marronage as an organizing frame for McKay’s texts is intricately tied to my understanding of how creolization as both an experience and a concept structures McKay’s sensibility and representations. “Creolization” is a term that is integrally associated with the Caribbean experience of hybridity. A complex variety of conceptual models exist, in works as diverse as Kamau Brathwaite’s seminal text *Contradictory Omens* mentioned above, Roberto Fernandez Retamar’s *Caliban and Other Essays*; Édouard Glissant’s *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*; Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant’s *Éloge de la Creolité* and many others, including the essays of scholars featured in Shepherd and Richards’ *Questioning Creole*.

All creolization models tend towards a trajectory in which the various cultures, ethnicities and races as well as racial mixtures of Caribbean societies are seen as dovetailing into a single, albeit heterogeneous, identity. However, more recent theorizations of Caribbean hybridity such as Antonio Benítez Rojo's concept of "Chaotic" supersyncretism in *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, Édouard Glissant's application of creolization as a descriptor of cultures other than the Caribbean (*Poetics of Relation*) and Shalini Puri's *The Caribbean Postcolonial* begin to point to a more multifarious concept in which the movement is not towards synthesis but towards multiple culturalities and subjectivities.

My dissertation finds resonance with these later conceptualizations. I therefore argue that McKay's representation of black men performs multiple and diverse subjectivities, not only in the Caribbean locations but also in different metropolitan locations where the African diaspora is located. More importantly, I argue that McKay's representation reflect, as well as marronage, the efficacies present in a creolized experience that allows for multiplicity without necessary synthesis. Marronage is an act and process of hybridity, both psychological and cultural, as it entails manipulating, re/inventing and crossing over various cultural and political spaces in order to create "new forms of being" that are able to survive and transcend hostile environments. I use the term "creolization" rather than hybridity, however, to signal McKay's own cultural origins and the ways in which those origins direct his representations of hybridizing marronage, regardless of whether he is addressing Caribbean or wider African diaspora subjectivities. Deploying creolization as an epistemological lens for describing McKay's

non-Caribbean men also allows me to unmoor terms from fixed localized positionings without disregarding the importance of their localization.

It is important that, in discussing McKay's characters, I mobilize the term "subjectivities" rather than "identity" or the singular form, "subjectivity." "Subjectivities" gives texture and form to the ambiguities that abound in McKay's representation of the individual and collective experience of the characters in his novels. Judith Butler's use of the term provides a context to, in her words, "rethink the scenes of reproduction"⁵ in order to get at the "racial industry" and hence some of the social, cultural and historical practices of (hegemonic) masculinities,

not only as ones through which a heterosexual imperative is inculcated, but as ones through which boundaries of racial distinction are secured as well as contested. Especially at those junctures in which a compulsory identity works in the service of maintaining hegemonic forms of racial purity, the threat of [alternative subjectivities] takes on distinctive complexity (Butler 18).

From this standpoint, "identity" seems a regulatory ideal produced as part of what Butler argues is a "regulatory power" that not only constitutes external influence, but also maintains a normative means by which [in this case black] "subjects are formed" (Butler, 22). Thus, the term "subjectivities" offers a re-articulation of identity in so far as it deconstructs the meaning of race and masculinity as "vectors of power" producing homogenizing imperatives (Butler 8). "Subjectivities" speaks to the way the "maroon subjects" in McKay's texts challenge the "symbolic hegemony" (Butler, 16), thereby

⁵ See Judith Butler's *Bodies that Matter* where she discusses in her Introduction how the category of "sex" influences the relationship between the "materiality of the body" and the "performativity of gender." In this discussion she examines how regulatory practices (normative acts) direct the meaning and value of sex as a constructed category.

troubling and complicating monolithic concepts of “blackness,” whether produced in black (American) nationalist discourse, white racist representations, or black feminist revisions of nationalist readings. “Subjectivities” equally invokes not only the multiplicity inherent in maroon practices, but also the *contingent* aspects of self-fashioning, particularly where, as in maroon contexts, the self is placed under siege by external forces.

Contingency enables the performativity that Butler and others such as Stuart Hall, Sandra Lipsitz Bem, Judith Halberstam and Elaine Showalter see as fundamental to the assumption of gender roles. “Subjectivities,” then, brings attention to the performativity of gender, race, creolization and marronage as well as that of cosmopolitanism and transnationalism, which are consequently revealed as contingent poses rather than fixed states or established transitions. Indeed, “subjectivities” also aligns with the recognition that masculinity itself is already a plural, diverse concept as noted by scholars such as R. W. Connell, Michael Kimmel, Harry Brod, Phillip Brian Harper, Ronald L Jackson II, Robert Reid-Pharr and Athena Mutua. Thus, when I use the term “masculinity” I am using it variously and contingently, its characteristics and contours shifting in context according to how each character’s gendered performance manifests itself. In Chapters 2 and 3 I use it interchangeably with “male subjectivity” to indicate that the character’s view of himself has to do with the fact that he is male. In these contexts masculinity indicates the male’s sense of freedom and authority to create his own versions of himself. In Chapter 4, where I argue that Bitá Plant is McKay himself in drag, masculinity spans both the idea that she is a man (McKay) in metaphor and the idea that, in keeping with the creolized nature of all Caribbean social and cultural productions, Bitá does not inhabit

the traditional roles assigned to women; she exerts the authority normatively assigned to males in patriarchy.

This view of masculinity appears to demonstrate that femininity cannot be authoritative; however, I associate femininity with a different set of profiles, more to do with covert modes of power than the open display of authority. By associating femininity with covert means of power, I complicate masculine authority that depends on performance and the subterfuge of marronage as its technologies. (I am using “performance” here to mean playing out or en/acting a part, and this of course always has implications for covert subversions of visible/assigned identities). What this investment in covertness and subterfuge means is that masculine performances are imbued with the feminine and may be displayed by either sex. I elaborate these concepts (which I admit are of a tenuous quality) more fully in Chapter 4 by drawing on comparable ideas elaborated by Caribbean scholars.

In deploying the terms “marronage”, “creolization” and “subjectivities” to theorize McKay’s fictions, I highlight a broader range of representation for black/migrant/maroon being, outside of any state of abjection, regulation, normativity or racial or political hegemony. I show how the processes of self-articulation performed by the characters in McKay’s texts are endowed with the subjects’ desires to escape the limitations assumed in the projection of the black body as an abject/marked object or one that signifies for particular, fixed black agendas. Indeed, further, the term “subjectivities” supports the trope of marronage in so far as it helps magnify acts of flight as processes rather than ends in themselves. Together, both “marronage” and “subjectivities” imply a sense of ambiguity and plurality in the performativity of the subject and draw attention to

the methods of negotiation that give such characters as seen in *Home to Harlem*, *Banjo*, and *Banana Bottom* the opportunity to live outside the homogenizing boundaries of race, class, or nation state.

The concept of subjectivity allows one to see marronage and creolization as “spaces of being that are wrought from the interruptive, interrogative, tragic, experience of blackness, of discrimination, of despair” (Bhabha 424). We are able to see how McKay’s characters are not always in despair or mere opposition (as though their entire existence were a reply to pre-eminent others), but contemplative, restitutive, resourceful, and whole. And to marry “subjectivity” and “marronage” is to signify upon the vagabond lifestyles of these male characters, lifestyles that are based on tightrope walking and certain ambiguity. For the construction of maroon “subjectivities,” as opposed to “identities,” helps to convey the vagabond lifestyles of McKay’s migrant subjects and highlight their tightrope experiences of living betwixt and between, within and without. Donald E. Hall sums this up beautifully when he argues that “subjectivity as a critical concept invites us to consider the question of how and from where identity arises, to what extent it is understandable, and to what degree it is something over which we have any measure of influence or control” (4).

Similarly, linking the concept of subjectivity to “performance” allows me to address some specific aspects of the subjectivities of McKay’s characters. Because performance is an implicitly fluid process that is at times improvisational, and because it also assumes some unpredictability in its “transmission and dissemination of cultural practices through collective representations” (Roach 25), it is helpful to demonstrate how McKay’s characters wear shifting disguises and guises as masks behind which maroon

powers can be created and tried out. Performance enables the act of moving beyond psychological borders as well as borders of “identity” and characters are able to re-imagine/reinvent notions of self-hood and home as well as gender as a social and racial construct. In other words, performance offers a “place for transgression, for things that could not happen otherwise, or elsewhere” (Roach 28).

Performativity is a basic feature of gender and it has particular resonance in Caribbean and black diasporan history because of the ways in which the regimes of slavery and colonization forced their victims to disguise resistance and use guerilla tactics, which are essentially performances, or acts of masking. These maskings engendered new personas that functioned in critical ways to subvert the powers of the plantation system and test the foundations of the institution of slavery. The mask (whether as maroon warfare, Anancyism, Brer Rabbitting, creole languaging⁶ or even Uncle Tomming) became a vehicle for possessing, inhabiting and masquerading within plantation space as other than slaves. Scholars such as Abrahams, Puri, Gilroy, Walcott, Forbes, Kanhai, Aching, and a host of others have examined and theorized the work of performance in Caribbean and African American cultures, including black male culture.

Finally, masking as a way of moving between worlds can be described as a balancing act, or tightrope maneuver, that requires maintaining psychological and physical equilibrium while negotiating and banishing restrictive borders. The maroon deploys his/her arsenal of performative maneuvers as a balancing act between resistance (the gaze focused on the oppressor) on the one hand, and self-invention and self-representation on the other (The gaze focused internally, on the self); the locus of

⁶ See Édouard Glissant’s *Caribbean Discourse* on the development of creole languages as acts of masquerade and tricksterism.

subjectivities lies in a shifting zone between these imperatives. The tightrope maneuver, that is, fleeing from, into, and between spaces whether psychological or physical, literal or imaginary enacts masking as a form of *technology*. By this I mean a tool of invention and re-invention: McKay's male characters make and invent stories that mirror or offer a basic critique of some of the essentialist meanings and representations of race, manhood, and identity, while also making new selves within the performative space.

McKay's black male characters live and negotiate hybrid worlds, whether Marseilles (France), Harlem (New York), or Clarendon (Jamaica) where conflicts, miscegenation, ambivalence, ambiguity and code switching abound. The hybridization of the characters shapes the subjectivities found in McKay's delineation of black masculinities to be a "resisting force, ambiguously poised as part of, but separate from" hegemonic masculinities (James 10-11). The structural design of the novels, unconventional, prismatic, improvisational, dialogic, implies the hybridic sensibility overlaying the creation of these maroon characters. *Home to Harlem's* and *Banjo's* narratives utilize episodic and documentary styles that signify upon the style and character of jazz and blues as cultural exponents of black expression and performance. This "fragmented" design is the very plot of the novel as it is the author's way of complicating the versions of black male subjectivities that are negotiated in these novels. While McKay follows a more chronologically explicit design in *Banana Bottom*, there is still the same complexity and paradox that define the actions and character of the novel's protagonist, Bitia Plant. The symbolic interplay of the pastoral with the urban, the religious with the secular (profane), the mentally colonized with the colonial, highlights the ontology of ambiguity that marks McKay's black male characters. In fact, we are able

to see McKay's own ambiguous character and what I describe as a textured self, coloring his literary creations and their journey-search for an ambiguous place called "home."

McKay, the son of peasants, was born in 1890 in the rural parish of Clarendon, Jamaica. At the age of seven he became the ward of his elder brother U-Theo who was responsible for his education and upbringing. It was while McKay was living with his brother that he was exposed to U-Theo's impressive library and by age ten was devouring U-Theo's entire collection. This is a significant aspect of McKay's intellectual development which impacted his political ideals as he began to form his own opinions through the regular debates in which he would engage with U-Theo. In 1909, McKay moved to Kingston where he joined the Jamaica Constabulary Force in 1911. It was while McKay was living in Kingston that another important mentor, Walter Jekyll, an Englishman doing cultural research in Jamaica, entered his life. There has been much debate and speculation about McKay's relationship with Jekyll and some critics have suggested that their relationship was homosexual, but, as Winston James has observed in his extensive study of McKay's life and poetry, there is no evidence to support this.

Under Jekyll's tutelage McKay's persona as a poet developed and he published poems in Jamaican language (then referred to as "dialect") in the island's two leading newspapers, the *Daily Gleaner* and the *Jamaica Times*. In 1912 he published two volumes of Jamaican language poetry, *Songs of Jamaica* and *Constab Ballads*, which served to launch his career as a writer. McKay was the first black Caribbean poet to use Jamaican Creole, the vernacular, or what NourbeSe Phillip (*A Genealogy of Resistance* 50) refers to as the "demotic," as his primary poetic medium and this can be seen as McKay's earliest flight from the British literary tradition, especially because Jamaican

Creole was not seen as a respectable or “fit vehicle for serious literary expression” (Wayne Cooper 36). Cooper, McKay’s biographer, believes that McKay “revealed in his dialect poetry the intellectual, social, and cultural contradictions that faced a perceptive black artist in British colonial Jamaica” (36). The cultural contradictions were to become a running theme in his fictional treatment of the African diaspora. Inherent in Cooper’s assertion are the creole/hybridic tensions that are central to Caribbean life and culture and a manifest part of McKay’s maroon existence and literary productions.

At the age of twenty-one, with the aid of his Jamaican benefactor, Walter Jekyll, McKay emigrated to the United States in order to study agronomy at the Booker T. Washington led Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute. However, he was never satisfied with his life at Tuskegee, noting that “he could not fit into Tuskegee’s system of education” and “soon sought a transfer to Kansas State College in Manhattan, Kansas” (Cooper 67-68). This too is important, as McKay indicated that his problem with Tuskegee was its adherence to rigid codes of seeing, obviously too straitjacketed for a man used to the fluidities of a Jamaican existence between the worlds of standard English and Creole, a white English mentor and a black Jamaican one, life as a police constable and life as a poet, between the perspectives of the city and those of the rural folk, between resistance to colonialism and friendship with a representative of colony. As an emigrant McKay also came face to face with the brutality of racism in the South and formulated his own resistance to and critique of American discrimination. Indeed, it is fair to say, on the evidence of his books and personal letters,⁷ that McKay began to shape

⁷ An examination of some of McKay’s letters will show how his Caribbean identity made him a conspicuous member of the Harlem Renaissance and the elite black literary community.

a new maroon psychology while trying to figure out his place among black Americans and negotiating white racisms.

McKay's maroon spirit leaves the peculiar and disorienting conditions of the South after spending two years at Kansas State College. In the spring of 1914 we find him in New York "gripped by the lust to wander and wonder" being full of "the spirit of the vagabond, the daemon of some poets" (Cooper 70). Indeed, this desire to wander and wonder was to become the defining characteristic of his life and part of the symbolic condition of his wandering band of men in the first two novels. Ray, his autobiographical subject in both *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo: A Story without a Plot*, inherits this "lust to wander and wonder" and is represented as a character in search of "home."

For a while McKay tried his hand at being a businessman, investing in a restaurant that failed in as short a time as his marriage to his "Jamaican sweetheart," Eulalie Imelda Lewars (Cooper 70). After working at odd and menial jobs, he was successful in publishing two of his poems in the literary journal *Seven Arts* (Cooper 70); these marked the early steps in his literary career in the United States. He was later published in *Pearson's Magazine* in September 1918; in the following year 1919, the socialist influenced magazine *The Liberator*, published seven of his most radical poems about racism in America (Cooper 89; 103).

Among these was the famous "If We Must Die" (1919) which called attention to McKay as a major player in the cultural event that was the Harlem Renaissance. This poem exemplifies the defiant, rebellious and revolutionary spirit of Maroon communities. Like the "abeng" that was used by the Maroons to call the community to action, this poem was a call to the black community in the United States to fight the racist conditions

of American culture and life. More than this, it was a declaration of pre-eminent self-hood defined beyond the parameters of mere reply and resistance: “If we must die/ Let it not be like hogs hunted and penned in an inglorious spot/.... Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,/Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back” (*Collected Poems* 177).

In that same year, McKay traveled to England where he met George Bernard Shaw and this meeting earned him a job to write for British suffragist and socialist Sylvia Pankhurst's trade union journal, *Worker's Dreadnought*. While in London McKay began reading Karl Marx and by the time he returned to the United States in 1921 to work for *The Liberator*, run by his friend Max Eastman, he had already become a socialist. Subsequently, he began to publish articles on race relations in America and his most popular volume of poetry, *Harlem Shadows*, was published in that same year. McKay returned to Europe and remained there after attending the Fourth International Communist Conference in Moscow. He published *Trial by Lynching: Stories about Negro Life in America* (1925) and in 1928, his first novel *Home to Harlem*.

These experiences of travel, activism, and his racial and cultural background make Claude McKay a very complex artist and storyteller. His tales reflect the hybrid relationality⁸ of his worlds, showing the educated classes alongside the under classes in conflict and exchange, in doubt as well as in desire. McKay's characters, their worlds,

⁸ See Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*, where he defines relationality variously as rhizomatic thought (the ability to see the networked connections among the various cultures, narratives and “humanities” of the world); as errantry, the act and condition of journeying as a passionate search for “the rhizome of a multiple relationship with the Other”; and as “totality”, “an imaginary [born out of errantry], that allows the detours that lead away from anything totalitarian” (pp. 11-18, Betty Wing translation). Ultimately, Glissant's relationality is “ a modern form of the sacred” (16) by which we release ourselves from stultifying allegiances (nationalisms, mono-lingualisms etc) that separate peoples from each other, and become willing to participate on equal, not hegemonic terms, in the “cluster of world narratives” (*Caribbean Discourse* p. 102)

their speech, their humor, their folk acts, and their meditations on life and the incumbent challenges reflect their “adaptability to reality, necessary to live in a world which has taken on much of the insecurity and blues-like absurdity known to those” whose bodies and whose subjectivities carry the burden of race and difference (Ellison 58-59). Ellison’s words describe well McKay’s maroon sensibility. It reflects the tightrope walk of his life as an outsider who had to negotiate his politics from multiple perspectives: as a Caribbean writer, a product of a colonial society, a black diasporic persona and a member of the African American literary community. Part of the blues-like absurdity is that McKay’s blackness is questioned and remarked upon with suspicion by some of his African American peers.

McKay’s cultural background made him an easy target for members of the black intelligentsia who saw him as unfit to represent American black consciousness and criticism because they believed he did not experience the brunt of white American racism since he was born and raised in the Caribbean. Yet this is far from the truth because McKay’s background as a colonial exposed him to the inequities of racial politics and he knew the brutality of slavery from his father’s stories. In essence, there were intimations that McKay did not fully understand the Negro in American life and culture. But McKay was a defiant member of the black community and showed this in the ways in which he wrote realistically rather than romantically about black life in the United States or outside.

McKay’s first novel, *Home to Harlem*, is, in a way, a documentary of life in Harlem. From the streets to the cabarets to the private social dens, the novel delineates a close-up view of black life in an American urban center and features Jake, an African

American soldier who deserts the army in World War I and returns to Harlem in search of the familiarities and pleasures of home. The novel privileges Jake's relationship with a Caribbean migrant, Ray, who has dropped out of Howard University and is working on the same train on which Jake is working. The intellectual personality and cultural identity of Ray have led some to argue for an autobiographical footnote that suggests a similarity in personal stories between McKay and this character in particular.⁹ I find this an interesting proposition but this project will seek to explore how deeply rooted an autobiographical imagination is in the fabric of all McKay's texts, especially as it imposes a certain ambiguity on his characters. Consequently, one of the questions this project intends to examine is the autobiographical link between McKay's "ambiguous self" and the creation of some of his characters, (namely Ray in *Home to Harlem* and Banjo and Bitia Plant in *Banana Bottom*) and how this ambiguity informs his discourse on black male subjectivities.

McKay achieves this provocative ambiguity by articulating not so much a black experience as a creole one that is located in the practices of diaspora. Much like the Antillean experience as described by Derek Walcott this black experience is a collective imperfect, unoriginal and paradoxical "mongrelized polyglot, a ferment without a history" (Walcott 71). (Here Walcott uses "history" to signify a delineated, definitive genealogy of origins, charted certainties of events on which a monolithic identity is based). It is from this cultural, historical and spatial matrix of the Caribbean where McKay's intellectual and creative projects emerge, "shards [from] a huge tribal

⁹ Much of the criticism and biographical work about McKay asserts that the character Ray is a reflection of the author. Ray's intellectual style and posture imitate McKay's politics and desires as a writer. Even though Ray is from Haiti, a French speaking island, and McKay is from Jamaica, their lives share parallel characteristics in the sense of vagabondage and radicalism.

vocabulary [echoing] partially remembered customs...not decayed but strong” (Walcott 70). This huge tribal vocabulary affords McKay, a writer who has Caribbean roots, to compose characters who are more than Caribbean, African American, African, black or white; are rather diasporic, Creole. Reminiscent of his own hybridic cultural, social (for he was living in Jamaica up to age 23) and historical background, McKay’s characters reflect the interpenetration of these different influences, and he portrays in his works, the varied complexions of “black” life that exist from Marseilles to Jamaica to New York. McKay’s treatment of this life “below” enables the concepts of creolization and marronage to commingle with each other in the metropolitan setting, a possibility that arguably comes from the ways of seeing he had adopted growing up in a creole and hybrid space, Jamaica.

The creole sensibility of McKay’s texts makes it important to instigate questions about the mainstream constructions of sexuality, manhood, gender, race, nation and history that prevail in the USA. It is the investment in the paradoxes of creolization and marronage that gives tremendous weight to McKay’s biographer Wayne Cooper’s words that “of all the major African American writers who emerged in the 1920’s, Claude McKay remains the most controversial and least understood” (*Home to Harlem* ix). What Cooper references is a significant factor that drives this research project and is central to how a closer look at McKay’s controversial position can impact the meaning and historicization of the Harlem Renaissance in general.

CHAPTER ONE

Tightrope Walking: Negotiating Masculine Subjectivities in *Home To Harlem*

And I have been a tightrope walker all my life,
That is tightrope walking has been my main occupation...
It is a fine life, those uncontained moments
In the air
Those nerve-stretched belly-bottom spasms
From here to there...
Lorna Goodison, "Tightrope Walker"

Claude McKay's 1928 bestseller *Home to Harlem* provoked W.E.B. DuBois's infamous dismissive statement, "after the dirtier parts of its filth I feel distinctly like taking a bath" (*Two Novels* 202). DuBois' specific objection was to McKay's graphic and unvarnished portrayal of the seething, wonderfully "Chaotic"¹⁰ life of the black underclass in Harlem. This distaste for McKay's unvarnished representation of black life in Harlem is not surprising, given DuBois' investment in the Talented Tenth as the face of the New Negro. Through his characters, in their maroon-like performances, McKay deconstructs the "New Negro" as the original or pure-man, the better-man who has not only the talent to breathe new life into the race but also the responsibility to lead the race. The self assigned arbitrators of the Harlem Renaissance sought, while exploiting the material and spiritual life of the peasant folk, to cast doubt on McKay's realism by decrying it as filth. Yet this is the irony of the Harlem Renaissance, because as a maroon-like movement in a maroon-like community, it was birthed in this "filth" and should know no shame in its practices.

¹⁰ See Benítez- Rojo. Benítez- Rojo explains that he capitalizes the word "Chaotic" "to indicate that I am not referring to chaos as conventionally defined [but to mean that] within the (dis)order that swarms around what we already know of as Nature, it is possible to observe dynamic states or regularities that repeat themselves globally." p.2.

McKay's recalcitrant, working class maroon men fly in the face of nation and citizenship as these are configured in mainstream white and black USA. Their styles, attitudes and actions trouble the representation of nation state, citizenship, and manhood because, as these men perform, they echo what Joseph Roach describes as "the memory of otherwise forgotten substitutions – those that were rejected and, even more invisibly, those that have succeeded" (Roach 5). The impact of slavery and its dehumanizing practices upon the community and psyche of blacks imposed a certain kind of memory that "predestinates" the forgetting of cultural and personal acts relevant to the freedom of expression. What this "forgetting" produces is the anomaly of a static performance geared toward homogenizing the black community. Furthermore, this loss of memory also alienates the black community from itself in so far as rigid boundaries are erected to police the subjectivities, attitudes, and expressions of all blacks.

While the arbiters of the Harlem Renaissance were aware of these issues surrounding the power of race as a reactionary source in the black community, they found themselves caught between the need to decipher the implications of the new consciousness that the Renaissance represented, the need for a certain kind of rehabilitation of the Negro image, and the need as well to rewrite the self. Torn between double consciousnesses and paradoxical agendas, contemporary discussions and representations of the Renaissance were often marked by a kind of amnesia that failed to recognize the Renaissance as a negotiation of a new space within and outside the plantation (the mainstream/white culture) but doing so from "the lower frequencies,"¹¹ to

¹¹See the ending of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. As the Invisible Man retreats to his underground refuge, he remarks that: "And this is what frightens me: Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies I speak for you" (489). I find the term appropriate for my discussion of McKay's characters because these characters

use Ralph Ellison's term. It is the significance of the "lower frequencies" that is missing from purist definitions of "the New Negro."

I read *Home to Harlem* as a critique of the Harlem Renaissance as an event that is unaware of itself, both as a maroon-like political act and an undemocratic practice of elitist performances as well. Precisely as critic Nathan Huggins observes, McKay's characters are techniques of exposé who demand "democratic reform (*Harlem Renaissance* 303); these characters are used to challenge the meaning of the New Negro held by those in the Talented Tenth who wanted to wash the "Ethiope white," while ignoring the clout of "American urban politics and the implications of racism that have made [that kind of] reform irrelevant to Negro life" (Huggins 303). In this chapter I show how *Home to Harlem*, with its focus on black communal urban life in 1920s Harlem, is the locus for the development of a range of black masculine desires and subjectivities rooted in the practice and psychology of marronage.

Home to Harlem provides an emblematic deep structure for describing black male subjectivities produced by such means. The structure and form of the novel unfold like a documentary film distilling a gritty realism of life for these men who are constantly on the move, negotiating the murky politics of labor unions, the racism of employers or the daily challenges of life after the war. McKay weaves multiple loose, interlocking narratives that replicate the motion of travel in and out of Harlem and the novel is ultimately structured around ebbs, flows and other rhythms that highlight the psychological and cultural meetings and journeys as much as the physical ones. Movement becomes the driving metaphor and structural design of *Home to Harlem*. The

represent voices from below, away from and beyond the mainstream or even the popular and accepted modes of representation and being.

peripatetic shifts of the novel replicate the “dances” and other balancing acts of McKay’s men as tightrope walkers. Further, even as the loose episodes are held together by the central motif of the protagonist Jake’s search for an elusive love he encounters through a one-night stand, they signify the reality of marronage as a circulating dance of journeys towards a place to call home.

The highs and lows, the linguistic “excursions” of the novel may be compared to the riffs and improvisations of a jazz performance, as dazzling in their intensity as the excursions of a tightrope walker. In my reading, McKay accomplishes a modified version of Ralph Ellison’s expectation of the black artist, by attempting to depict “what really happened within our areas of [black diasporic] life, putting down with honesty and without bowing to ideological expediencies the attitudes and values that give [black diasporic] life its sense of wholeness and which render it bearable and human and, when measured by our terms, desirable” (*Shadow and Act* 21). Here, by my bracketed insertion into Ellison’s words on the responsibility of the Negro artist, I have placed the emphasis on the “black diaspora” instead of Negro America so as to identify the more complex definition of race that McKay brings to the table. even though Ellison might have been writing three decades later, it is relevant to note also that McKay’s focus on the lower classes of blacks in his novels is doing exactly what Ellison asks, “putting down with honesty and without ideological expediencies” what is true of the complex realities of black life. Both Ellison and McKay feed off a textured life that is a function of their sensible and sensitive negotiations of race.

Marronage is a critical paradigm for discussing the Harlem Renaissance and, indeed, essential in any theorizing of the new black militancy, self-assertion, and

diasporic political and economic iteration at the time. This cultural event is indeed a maroon experience, shaped by the maroon *raison d'être* where acts of flight, resistance, critique and rejection of “old assumptions and old images” (Huggins 58) demonstrate a profound desire to free the American Negro “from the fictions of the past and [thus enable] the rediscovery of himself” (Huggins 59). Major acts of flight can be seen in the movements from the US South to the North, of Caribbean[s], South Americans and Africans flocking to the metropolis looking for some kind of “refuge” or “home-space.” And this example of flight is exemplified in McKay’s Ray, a Caribbean man and Jake, his best friend, a migrant from the South who moves to Harlem. They both live in a polyglot, heterogeneous and indeed cross-border society which makes the Harlem Renaissance a diasporic phenomenon. Nathan Huggins observes that Harlem

brought together black men [and women] of the most diverse backgrounds and interests. There were Africans and West Indians as well as Negroes from the south and north of the United States. There were city men, town men, and village men; the peasant, the student, the business man, the professional man, artist, poet, musician, adventurer and worker, preacher and criminal, exploiter and social outcast. Each group [came] with its own separate motives and for its own special ends, but their greatest experience [was *the*] finding of one another (*Harlem Renaissance* 58).

McKay presents Harlem as the “culture capital” and a place for the gathering of the emerging New Negro. He signifies upon the idea that this Harlem is “indeed the Great Mecca for the sight-seer, the pleasure-seeker, the curious, the adventurous, the enterprising, the ambitious, and the talented of the whole Negro world; for the lure of it

has reached down to every island of the Caribbean Sea and has penetrated even into Africa”(Weldon Johnson 301). The lure of Harlem for those who came, was the maroon “push and pull,” the push to remove oneself from the state of powerlessness, and the pull to build – outside and on the edge of the plantation culture – a community whose ethos is integrity. Removing oneself from the state of powerlessness while seeking to establish a new non-slave self produces a maroon consciousness that is based in finding and expressing a true self, a self that is not “downpressed”¹² I use the Rastafarian substitute, “downpressed” both to convey the state of McKay’s men being outside the accepted “vocabularies” of mainstream America and to highlight an aspect of maroon technology, the reordering of language by the symbolic power of the plantation. Maroon consciousness, as it is deployed in McKay’s texts, shows a desire by his protagonists Jake and Ray especially, to project and protect their true selves at all cost. Their actions force them to devise the kinds of adaptations necessary for their survival – adaptation to otherwise adverse economic and social environments.

McKay’s working class protagonists demonstrate the ways in which, as they sought to find a place in the city, black people who “fled” to Harlem introduced a rupture or break in the order of the city. The seeming overflow of black bodies inhabiting this space forced a reordering of this same space with their migrant selves. The presence of black bodies introduces the idea of excess and that presence was now re-constructed in the imaginations of both blacks and whites as deviant and foreign as is exemplified in Jake’s comment that Harlem is a “little thicker, little darker, and noisier and

¹² Term used by Rastafarians to mean “oppressed.” Rastafarians often coin words by posing opposite concepts to those suggested by the actual meaning of a word or by its sound. “Oppressed” in Rastafarian thought is a deliberate misnomer since its first syllable is homophonous with “up”, which is seen as a positive word as in “upstanding” or “looking up.”

smellier...the niggers done plowed through Hundred and Thirtieth Street. Heading straight foh One Hundred and Twenty-fifth” (25-26). Jake’s comment highlights the change, demographic and other that has emerged in the appearance of “plenty moh nigger shops” while “Seventh Avenue done gone highbrown” (26). Thus, these male migrants break the social and economic (b)order of the city, a kind of rupture that leaves McKay’s characters in “uncontained moments in the air.”¹³ Indeed, the break that occurs in the (b)order and economy of the city increases the profile of these characters while taking away their safety nets, forcing them to confront the hegemonies of race, class, sexuality and gender on their own improvised terms, in their own time, and with newly acquired technologies. Therefore, the city becomes a space where McKay’s male characters develop and (per)form alternative subjectivities in an effort to remove themselves from states of dis-ease and powerlessness.

McKay’s focus on forms of flight that are not escape but critique/rejection of old forms and negotiation of new spaces of being, elucidates the ground on which I theorize the Harlem Renaissance as another expression of marronage. For it exposes the fact that the New Negro was not really new at all. Alain Locke and other stewards of the Renaissance called for the emergence of a Negro defined by “a new kind of consciousness.” McKay’s men, and by extension the classes of Harlem denizens they represent, run counter to the attitude of the intellectuals who saw themselves as representative of the New Negro. These intellectuals, in falling victim to a cultural amnesia, or what Wilson Harris (“Literacy and the Imagination”) refers to as cultural illiteracy, seemed unable to place the uprising slaves of the cotton and cane fields, the devisers of the technology of the Underground Railroad, the story telling creators of

¹³ Taken from Lorna Goodison’s poem “Tightrope Walker” used as the epigraph to this chapter.

Anancy and Brer Rabbit, etc, and the working class “underbelly” of Harlem from whom ironically they drew literary sustenance, as having already produced a new kind of consciousness, a new kind of community through their acts of marronage.

The very presence of such a diverse, cross-border, trans-“national” community as Huggins describes, is the basis to understand the manner in which McKay seeks to introduce a new dynamic and a new kind of being in order to broaden the perspectives and the discourse surrounding black masculine subjectivities. Implicit in this “newness,” is the idea that it existed *in continuity from* and improvisation upon the maroon forms of the slave plantations. The “unknown quantity” and disruptive nature of new black bodies peopling the city’s scapes, which I pointed to above, replicates the disturbance caused by the maroon. Jake’s and Zeddy’s presence in Harlem reshapes the city’s social and political terrain because they claim the space as American soldiers recently returned from war and thus carry with them a particular swagger that is based in their knowledge that they are now citizens, having just fought for their country. Thus, they represent even if symbolically a “disturbance” to the nature of post World War I American life and culture, especially as these men return to Harlem and seek to relocate themselves as arbitrators for their own freedoms. Jake’s insistence that he will not scab and that he is not a “joiner” or that he will not be a “white folks’ nigger [or] a poah white’s fool” (44), signals his sense of his individuality, someone who will manage at all times his person, his actions and the conditions for and of his freedom. Jake’s refusal to be used by the white man who tries to persuade him to scab is indicative of Jake’s maroon ethic and consciousness.

Yet, like those of the maroons who covered themselves in (walking) trees to disguise their movement from the slave hunters, the bodies of these men remain

camouflaged, based on the mismatch between their actions and the meaning of their actions on the one hand, and white stereotypes as well as black revisionist stereotypes about black performance on the other. One can see this demonstrated in Zeddy's words when he tells Jake that he will "scab through hell to make a living" (44). While Zeddy responds to the same situation differently than Jake, both men are using maroon skill of camouflage to protect themselves and secure their [own] freedoms. While Jake feels scabbing is morally despicable and that this is an opportunity for white men to continue to oppress and use black men, Zeddy demonstrates how he is no "white man's fool" and he is using as much as he might be used. "White mens don't want niggers in them unions, nohow. Ain't you a good carpenter? And aint I good blacksmith? But kain we get a look-in on our trade heah in this white man's city? Ain't white mens done scabbed niggers outa all the jobs they useter hold down in this city? Waiter, bootblack, and barber shop?" (48) Zeddy's comment carries the same principle as Jake's and celebrates the different ways in which the maroon character negotiates his survivals. Further, their performance of recalcitrant subjectivities as explored by McKay, rests on the in-betweenity, or liminality of the space they occupy, rejecting the value systems of the dominant culture while existing circumscribed within this same culture.

As one who lived in Harlem and studied the nature of black life in Harlem, McKay is aware of the complex racial and cultural atmosphere. By creating *Home to Harlem* with the very members of this maroon-like society, McKay advances a view and a critique of the Harlem Renaissance based in the politics of the working class African diasporic and migrant populations. His view is deeply invested in paying homage to the culture and people from the inside, a culture and people who speak from the "lower

frequencies,” to use Ralph Ellison’s enigmatic phrase repeated at the end of his novel *Invisible Man*. McKay’s characters, Jake, Ray, Zeddy, Billy Biasse, Nije Gridley, Gin Head Susy, Miss Curdy and Congo Rose are voices from Harlem’s fringes [and whose lives and expressions challenge the boundaries of representing black identities. Their lives and expressions push the boundaries of how black subjectivities may be represented McKay’s investment in the Jakes and Rays of this world leaves the troubling question resounding in black (and even white America), “Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?”

Home to Harlem tells the story of Jake, a World I soldier who returns to Harlem via London after deserting the US army. Upon his return, he meets and falls in love with a prostitute, Felice, who, after a one-night stand, disappears. The rest of novel is a description of Jake’s journey through Harlem, cruising in search of his lost “love.” McKay complicates this search by introducing halfway through the novel another character, Ray, who becomes Jake’s best friend and mentor. Ray, a Haitian intellectual and Renaissance man of sorts, complements Jake, who is worldly and free spirited and becomes the other central figure in the novel. Together the two represent alternative possibilities of maroon expression, but equally, they stand as a representation of a wholistic maroon personality in which dualities become merged.

At the same time, through their eyes, we are treated to the raw realities of life in “‘the semi-underground’ of single, black, working class men in the industrial Northeast in the years following World War I. They were all migrants from the American South or the West Indies” (Wayne Cooper xx) who had come to Harlem looking for work, refuge or wealth. By entering the cabarets, the nightclubs, the saloons, the gambling dens, the

streets, the buffet flats and houses of prostitution, and even work places where they play out complex subjectivities, McKay's novel captures with stark honesty a blues atmosphere and a maroon geopolitical environment where vagabondage, tightrope walking, risk taking, flight, return and diversions of all sorts abound. In fact, the novel is a quintessential maroon story where McKay's cast of men includes other minor characters who are negotiating Harlem's volatile world with maroon technologies learned from below. Consequently, the text is as much about black life in 1920's Harlem as it is a criticism of the Harlem Renaissance which refused to acknowledge the presence of the black underclass, the "niggers" as "bodies that matter."¹⁴

Jake, Ray, and their companions Zeddy and Billy Biasse exemplify Goodison's tightrope walker in every facet of their lives of marronage. They live between the worlds of rich and poor, black and white, respectable and destitute, visible and invisible, rural and urban, American and foreign, object and subject in a city within the city. The "in-betweenness" of this life in Harlem's black metropolis requires a certain "technique of life"¹⁵ that these characters use to make the risks they take appear as style. Whereas they have to live as men shifting from one event to another and in the process shape their lives as survival stories, their movements have a particular quality to them, composed with bold intrigue and improvisations. Thus, tightrope walkers are not predictable or formulaic, neither are they caricatures or stereotypes; they are free spirited and adventurous, daring and unpredictable, creative and elusive. What happens in the case of this movement in between spaces is a spectacular event; indeed, the risk-taker becomes

¹⁴ I borrow this phrase from Judith Butler's provocative text of the same title.

¹⁵ I borrow the phrase from Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life" in *Modernism*, ed. Michael H. Whitworth, p.183

his art, fashioning himself not just through the act of taking flight, but also by becoming the event as well.

In *Home to Harlem*, the city itself is the “tightrope” and thus it is an ambiguous space that is, like the space in Goodison’s poem “a fine life” – a maroon life – in fact one that is simultaneously home and not home and one that attracts and repels simultaneously. In effect, this ambiguity performs the work of marronage in developing the subjectivities of McKay’s men in *Home to Harlem*; they are “seekers” and the experience of their search suggests on the one hand, a political act of rebellion, and on the other, a personal act of independence that means not only survival but also self-making and self-representation. In addition, these characters are seeking a home-space and are involved in the making of this space. Their acts of flight and return are ways in which one can reflect on the changing dynamics of masculinities in black America during the first half of the 1920’s, as these flights were part of a domestic project to invent homes within and outside of the traditional middle class “white picket” fences available for certain classes of whites and blacks.

I want in this discussion of maroon tightrope walking to emphasize the fact that these men bring an oppositional frame to the concept of performance. While Judith Butler’s description of gender performance as an unstable, always reiterative act gives meaning to the ways in which McKay’s men negotiate the city-space, this description does not fully take into account the act of risk-taking that the Caribbean cultural form of marronage offers in the analysis of black male subjectivities in diasporic spaces. Performance as it relates to blackness in the United States has a particular connotation that suppresses the idea of fluidity inherent in Butler’s definition; this connotation invites

one to see black performance as an act in the imagination of a racist white community, as well as that of a self-loathing middle class black elite eager to achieve white status. In this context performance suggests that black body politics cannot succeed because for each role the body plays, and for each act it practices, its mainly white audience rewrites the script, making the performed and the performance a shadow or mimic show, in the Naipaulian sense of mimicry (*The Middle Passage* and *The Mimic Men*).

McKay confronts this political landscape and rejects the “already performed” status of the black male as well as the idea of black as a “problem”. Consequently, he explores the ways in which “negotiation” not “performance” per se as already defined, is the definitive act that propels black subjectivity, black experience and black expression. Therefore, I would assert that the men in *Home to Harlem* are not performers but negotiators of performance displaying and occluding their acts of tightrope walking as acts of marronage. Jake and Ray become the voices of cultural critique in this regard even as their negotiations shed light on the internal dis-ease that both face on different levels.

This dis-ease is part of the trauma of their dislocation: Ray’s deep intellectual angst and desire to be both primal and civilized, and Jake’s inability to locate himself in the nation which did not allow him to fight as a soldier and which refused him his full rights and freedoms. In this manner, these characters share a chiasmic relationship to self and society and, for dissimilar reasons, are in search of a home. One of the intriguing aspects of this search is seen in how McKay uses Ray’s angst and Jake’s search as a way of showing the search for “home spaces” within the black diaspora. And placing this crucial activity at the center of the novel McKay emphasizes again, the symbolic tensions that are at work within the making of diaspora lives and personalities. Indeed, McKay

uses the two different men, one Caribbean and the other Afro-American, one a radical, the other a conformist; one an intellectual, the other not; one a free spirit, the other a conservative to dramatize the struggle to find a “home” and thus reconcile the warring parts of a black body pulled and pushed by various racist tendencies at work in the society. Indeed, “warring parts” mark the ultimate representation of the symbolic split in Afro-American socio-cultural geographies.

The novel opens with a telling description of Jake’s circumstances on the ship where he works as a stoker. The space echoes the murky cultural, political, and social space at “home” in the United States. The turbulent and unhealthy atmosphere on board the ship sets up the scene from which Jake will withdraw or take flight, applying survival technologies in order to get “home”:

All that Jake knew about the freighter on which he stoked was that it stank between sea and sky. He was working with a dirty Arab crew. The captain signed him on at Cardiff because one of the Arabs had quit the ship. Jake was used to all sorts of rough jobs, but he had never before worked in such a filthy dinghy. The white sailors who washed the ship would not wash the stokers’ water closet, because they despised the Arabs. And the Arabs themselves made no effort to keep the place clean, although it adjoined their sleeping berth (1).

Inherent in this description is the invocation of the kind of negotiations that Jake must enter in order to reach home. The “filth” that the narrator describes recalls conditions on the slave ships of the Middle Passage and sets the tone for seeing the psychological and physical space as ones requiring negotiation. (Indeed, we could easily argue that the slave ship already bred a new kind of black being, a psychology of

negotiation that we could describe as marronage). This is the first instance which shows Jake making tracks as a maroon, taking flight psychologically from this “unclean” and “unhealthy” place to secure a place of freedom wherein he can manage his subjectivity, observe and act as an outsider from the inside. Jake is not only marginalized because he lives with the Arabs but also because he is black. Here lies his tightrope walk because he must perform a balancing act between the Arabs whom the whites despise, and the racist whites who are his superiors.

Jake’s knowledge about the freighter shows what is at stake in this tightrope experience. Like the maroon who has left the plantation and whose life is now centered on protecting his freedoms, Jake, at this point a psychological maroon, is extremely aware of his environment and can recognize very quickly what “technologies” (underground economic incentives given to the cook to secure a better diet, non-committal headshakings in situations of conflict) are necessary not only to survive in such a space but also to negotiate his way back to Harlem. The fact that “the cooks hated the Arabs because they did not eat pork,” (1) meant something else had to be cooked for them and emphasizes with greater particularity the dis-eased environment:

The cooks put the stokers’ meat, cut in unappetizing chunks, in a broad pan, and the two kinds of vegetables in two other pans. The stoker who carried the food back to the bunks always put one pan inside of the other, and sometimes the bottoms were dirty and bits of potato peelings or egg shells were mixed in with the meat and the vegetables.

The Arabs took up a chunk of meat with their coal-powdered fingers, bit or tore off a piece, and tossed the chunk back into the pan (1-2).

Jake on the other hand is expected to eat the regular food, for his black body precludes his pleading Arab ethnicity. The threat that eating poses to Jake's health backgrounds the politics that require him to walk a tightrope as both worker and member of an already marginalized community of men; and even though he was "used to the lowest and hardest sort of life...his leather-lined stomach could not endure the Arabs' way of life" (2). The manner in which he resolves this situation gives insight into his character as a maroon figure. He gives the chef a "ten-shilling note and the chef gave him his eats separately" (2). On the surface, this act might seem simple and lacking in ingenuity but what is missing in such an analysis is the way Jake participates in the system in a political manner so as to preserve his place on the ship. In addition, by giving the ten-shilling note to the chef, Jake is using his maroon consciousness to demonstrate the scope of his power and the kind of intelligence he possesses as a tightrope walker.

This action is similar to how he responds to his white shipmate's comment that "you're the same like us chaps. You ain't like them dirty jabbering coolies" (3). Instead of seizing the opportunity to align himself with the power structure and "pass" (if only for a moment) for better than his Arab mates, or revealing disgust towards this naked attempt at divide and rule co-optation, Jake "smiled and shook his head in a non-committal way. He knew that if he was just like his white sailors, he might have been signed on as a deckhand and not a stoker" (3). Here again, he has to negotiate his way out of a certain kind of danger by remaining "silent," but not static, and produces an ambiguous shake of his head. His action demonstrates his goal, which is to promote his own integrity, first, as a man, second, as a laborer and third, as a mate on the ship. His refusal to accept the stereotype that the white shipmates have of him as a "gullible"

Uncle-Tom type who would be willing to betray or dismiss his fellow sailors in order to earn a momentary favor, coupled with his move to protect his individual interest, marks Jake as an ambivalent figure much like the historical maroons who preserved a “neutral” face in the negotiations with the British colonial war machinery. Here Jake reveals himself not as an ideologue in the ways that might have pleased the Harlem intelligentsia, but as an individual finding his own ways to defend his independence and assert his own brand of masculine propriety in a very hyper-masculine space. Indeed, his ambivalent action is invested with a kind of rhetorical impulse insofar as his “voiced silence” (NourbeSe Philip 48) has the power to invoke his manliness and demonstrate the foundations upon which it is built.

Jake’s ambiguity speaks to another aspect of his maroon subjectivity, the art of remaining visible while being invisible at the same time. He adopts this persona not because he wants to keep the hierarchical structure on the ship intact or because he does not want to be labeled a troublemaker, but because, as he puts it, all he cares about is going home. He says “Roll on Mister Ship, and stinks all the way you rolls. Jest take me ’long to Harlem is all I pray. I’m crazy to see the brown-skin chippies ’long Lenox Avenue. Oh boy!” (3) Jake’s construction of his masculine subjectivity is premised on the concept that home is derived not from the place one is in, but from the agency and respect one is able to freely exercise.

Indeed, Harlem is not a physical space in Jake’s mind but a powerful symbol of his selfhood. The availability of this space as “home” assures him of a certain kind of respectability and personal swagger that is unavailable on the ship, or even when he was a part of the war. Harlem, as a maroon [-like] space, gives Jake the opportunity to fashion

himself, hence his desire to get there at all cost. The way he longs for and calls up the space signifies on its meaning as a powerful mythological manifestation: in the words of Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., pastor of the Abyssinian Baptist Church, “ the symbol of liberty and the Promised Land to Negroes everywhere...the Mecca for all those who seek Opportunity with a capital O” (Anderson 61). In a very real sense, Harlem figures in Jake’s imagination also as the land of ancestral return towards which the original maroons yearned (and indeed some did return to Africa, particularly Sierra Leone via Canada). Here, Jake asserts what Barbara Webb describes as the preservation of “the lost homeland in the forest of marronage while actively participating in the making of his own history” (*Myth and History in Caribbean Fiction* 10).

Jake’s urgent desire reaffirms his outsider-from-the-inside status on the ship and re-imagines his disappointing experiences abroad as a combatant in World War I His desire to get home to Harlem also sheds light on the fact that his time away from “home” is similar to a kind of “petit marronage,” where the slave would run away for short periods of time to visit friends or family on another plantation, or would pass as free in the free black-and-brown urban communities.¹⁶ Leaving Harlem to take part in WWI was petit-marronage, especially when one considers that his absence is a relief from the threat of lynchings and other barbaric death sentences. However, during this flight, Jake is refused participation in the “war of freedom” and has to perform, not as an American soldier, but as a “hired hand,” building huts to house his “white comrades,”(4) the ones who were considered the real United States fighters. This exclusion and marginalization forces Jake into a “grand marronage” – a total desertion of the place without any intent to

¹⁶ See Gad Heuman’s explication of marronage in which he differentiates between petit marronage and grand marronage in *Brief Histories: The Caribbean*, pp. 55-66.

return – and he eventually takes flight in search of the adventure he had fervently sought in the war.

McKay highlights the maroon ambiguity in Jake's actions in the sentence "Jake obtained leave." On the one hand, it seems as if Jake is granted permission to leave the army and on the other, by the declarative in the active form of the verb (leave as something he got for himself), it seems as if he "leaves" without the explicit consent or knowledge of his superiors. By poising the sentence on the cusp between passive reception and active seizure, McKay suggests Jake as a broker seeking his freedom. The mysterious nature of the circumstances coupled with the risk implied, make Jake's action admirable and daring. Jake's boldness comes, not just from the risk he takes, but also from the fact that he is able to find a way to circumvent the possible mine-fields that could make this a dangerous activity. Symbolically, "he obtained leave" conceals and plays with the element of danger involved in this action and gives focus to Jake's confidence about his efforts. One can see in his actions the innovative and survivalist features that are evident in maroon psychology.

The open-endedness of the sentence also provokes the question: is Jake a deserter? In as much as it is difficult to clarify how Jake obtained his leave, it is just as difficult to portray him as a deserter because he was not invested with the identity of "soldier," even though he enlisted to be an American fighter. His maroon sensibilities make the question of desertion irrelevant, since his action is based on his desire to preserve his freedom and exercise his rights as citizen and (hu)man. Indeed, the question serves to highlight the ways the maroon's insider outsider status frames ambiguous and disturbing freedoms in plain sight, and how the maroon may invoke his "belonging" for

the purposes of policing or combating dis/identification and erasure. The question further highlights Jake's new status as a vagabond. He is not a vagabond because he is a wandering, route/rootless person or because he lives recklessly or because he lives outside the rule of law. He is a vagabond because he seeks to contingently negotiate the places or spaces he inhabits or which inhabit him. Vagabondage is a way of life maintained by acts of resistance that go against the grain of social or cultural restrictions. It inhabits on its own terms open, abandoned spaces as well as open, communally owned ones (what in medieval and early modern British parlance were referred to as common lands).

More so, vagabondage encroaches upon private, enclosed spaces and leaves behind the marks of its visitations in actual physical artifacts and psychological disturbances. In the deep wooded spaces and mountains inhabited by the historical maroon, however, the term vagabond loses its efficacy and relevance, since these bounds were outside the pale of society. Jake is deliberate in "taking leave" from the army and in doing so redefines his masculine subjectivity as active and not passive; further, he does so in ways that place him doubly in in-between spaces as vagabond (encroacher) and maroon (independently re-mapping interior "wild" spaces; that is to say, spaces of mind that reject white and "New Negro" prescriptions alike.)

The flight recalls the dangers inherent in marronage as slaves who ran away from the harsh life of some plantations risked being brutally flogged, dismembered or even killed if caught. Jake's risk carries the same danger as he could lose his life if he is caught. Thus, his decision to take flight is a profound act of rebellion in so far as it enacts a heroic challenge to the military and racial systems that marginalize him. Jake's active

performance in both the army and the war was integral in deconstructing white male identity as citizen, hero or leader. For how could he prove that he was no different than his white counterpart if he could not participate in the war? The narrator reveals how this affected him and the reason for his euphemistic or ambiguous exit:

Jake was disappointed. He had enlisted to fight. For what else had he been sticking a bayonet into the guts of a stuffed man and aiming bullets straight into a bull's-eye? Toting planks and getting into rows with his white comrades at the Bal Musette were not adventure (4).

Jake's reflections reveal his interest in representing his masculinity as part of his subjectivity as an American soldier. McKay's phrasing is important: Jake is disappointed precisely because he does not get to fight in the war. He is not disappointed about comradeship: by using the term "his white comrades" without irony to represent how the white soldiers appear in Jake's eyes, the narrator makes it clear that for Jake, inferiority is not an issue – in no way has he internalized any idea of inferiority. He does not consider himself a "victim," even as he deals with the fact that his country has once again excluded him. Though the disappointment causes his "dis-ease" that eventually forces him to withdraw from the army, Jake is internally free from the powerlessness of the undemocratic system in the army even as it was designed to dispossess him. He affirms his own manhood and his subject position in the process of resistance and claims a certain kind of autonomy that makes his flight spectacular.

It is easy to read Jake's decision to join the army as an investment in mainstream American concepts of militaristic masculinity, where manhood is proven by the ability to carry a gun and 'shoot the guts out of a man' conceived as the enemy. But such a reading

overlooks the individual and trickster quotient of Jake's action, his attempts to negotiate for himself a renegade redefinition of citizenship by the insertion of his black body into the phenotype of the citizenry; moreover, his embrace of warfare as a stage upon which masculinity is enacted plays out not necessarily as a US phenomenon but as a phenomenon of West African world order carried by slaves to the "New World" plantations and within which Caribbean maroons such as Mackandal, Nanny, Cudjoe and Quashie referenced their identities as warrior kings within Shango's and Damballa's line. Damballa's, the serpent-god's line, speaks to the subterfuge of maroon warfare, and allows us another tropological lens from which to focus Jake's actions. It is important that Jake is not a "revolutionary" in the sense of using overt, oppositional tactics, but a maroon in the sense of negotiating with a straight face within the parameters set by the enemy. The Jamaican maroons signed treaties of peace with the British in order to secure the space of free tension, or tense freedom, for themselves in the mountainous environs of the plantation.

Harlem calls Jake and, even though he finds Europe less aggressive in its racism, he does not care to stay because European cities do not have the "call" of home that Harlem issues to him. Harlem, and not America, is the home space he imagines and feels he belongs to. The power of this call is what constitutes Jake's desire. The pull of Harlem underscores the power inherent in the environment's physical and cultural memory to shape and condition Jake's masculine performance as a "daring production of his experimental life" (Tate, 10). Jake's desire for Harlem therefore is "the action that creates things, makes alliances, and forges interactions" (Grosz 179, quoted in *Psychoanalysis and Black Novels*, 10) and eventually feeds Jake's "inventive" and

“aleatory” acts in the modern maroon space of Harlem (Grosz 180). Jake’s desire might be seen in a innovative or radical light as Harlem (re)places America in his memory and his longing for a home-space. His reconstruction is similar to marronage where slaves would desert the harsh life of the plantations in order to set up their own nation states within an already existing nationally/imperially owned space. This is the mentality that forms Jake’s concept of home. Indeed, Harlem is home, not because it is familiar, but because it is in his blood. He says, “Fifth Avenue, Lenox Avenue, and One Hundred and Thirty Fifth Street, with their chocolate-brown and walnut-brown girls, were calling him”(8) but more importantly,

the noises of Harlem. The sugared laughter. The honey-talk on its streets. And all night long ragtime and “blues” playing somewhere...singing somewhere, dancing somewhere! Oh, the contagious fever of Harlem. Burning everywhere in Harlem...Burning now in [his] Jake’s sweet blood (15).

The “call” of Harlem is to a home-space built upon the vastness of a diverse migrant community that defies the homogenizing borders of the nation state as defined by Benedict Anderson (*Imagined Communities*). Hence, Jake achieves something that many maroons who ran away to the hills achieved, the ability to “cast doubt on the foundations of the [plantation] system” (Heuman 62). Jake’s call to Harlem, therefore casts doubt on the idea of America as his home, especially at a time during the 1920’s when many black soldiers were returning to the same racist conditions they had left behind in order to fight in Europe. Jake’s particular call to Harlem signifies upon this practice of racism in America and the doubt that many returning soldiers had in their minds about their value in the making [of] and protecting of the American nation state.

The energy and expectancy in his descriptions above segue into his anticipation of Harlem as a prismatic space where he will be able to perform a range of masculine subjectivities that elaborate his social and cultural position as a subject, a space that “mitigates extremes and extends the range of intermediate possibilities [and also] arms itself against catastrophe by adopting ever more pliant and provisional attitudes” (Wirth-Nesher 7). Harlem’s pull offers Jake an escape, a refuge from the extremes of the ship, the Arabs he hates and who are despised by the whites and the whites he loathes because of their racist practices. Jake literally begs the ship to take him home to Harlem: “take me home to the brown gals waiting for the brown boys that done show their mettle over there. Take me home, Mister Ship. Put your beak right into that water and jest move along” (9). Thus, Harlem is identified as a salve for Jake’s underexposed and underutilized military manhood.

As a salve, Harlem sings Jake’s blues. And as a blues atmosphere, where melancholia is mixed with uninhibited carnal pleasures, Harlem, for Jake, provokes the various ways in which his blackness, his masculine performance and his humanity can find value the other “brown gals and brown boys” who share this blues experience. The blues, which flourished in Harlem, itself can be described as a kind of music of marronage. Developed on the plantation as psychological flight from unbearable suffering, the blues negotiated the tightrope space between suffering and violence by producing itself as an aesthetic response. The spectacular beauty of the music with its haunting and sensual melodies speaks to covert means of survival and resistance. This music, which Jake yearns for and which flourished in Harlem, houses the many valences of black expressive culture and life and belongs to a tradition of resistance that signifies

upon the slave songs and spirituals performed to suspend and lighten the dehumanizing conditions of slavery. Jake's call is, indeed, a psychological flight away from the extremes of life onboard the ship.

But this atmosphere is born also from the culture of a creole migrant population from the Caribbean, Africa, South America, and the US South. Jake is eager to enter a burgeoning metropolis equipped with the melodies of an immigrant population erupting into the ordered space of New York. In some way Jake's eagerness to enter this space is encouraged by the increasing numbers of black bodies, male and female, that threaten to abolish the existing boundaries in both private and public lives of a once white space. As Jervis Anderson observes:

the black population spilled across one or two of the borders that had been defined by those former white residents – as it extended west, across Morningside Drive and St. Nicholas Avenue, and north toward Washington Heights – people began to say that Harlem was spreading. This only meant, of course, that blacks were moving into areas that were previously white, and into sections of Washington Heights, west of Amsterdam Avenue, that were not formally regarded as being parts of Harlem (61).

More than this, the new migrants posed a threat to law-abiding, frugal, industrious, decent and morally upright Negroes who feared their images would be hijacked by the “dancehall-harlot, the diamond-decked lover and the princes of shame” (Anderson 67-68). Here lies the challenge of representing black subjectivity because it was reordering, and ultimately creating new geographies, boundaries, and politics that insisted on seeing the transgressive nature of those who were emerging as complex

migrant subjects. Thus, a new language emerged based on ways of speaking from below and which undermined some of the fictive versions of blackness that were restrictive and one dimensional. Inevitably, what this meant was a new way of seeing black masculinities because this burgeoning population of working class men, (of whom Jake, Zeddy and Billy Biasse are representative) offered productive and alternative yet relative versions of black masculinity. Jake knows the language of this maroon-like city because his own masculinity is predicated on the confidence he exercises in this space and the expression of his masculinity is based on a sophisticated maroon consciousness matured by the cosmopolitan experience of being abroad.

In the novel, as in social reality, Harlem, with its varied folk rhythms, music, dances, speakeasies, fashion and sex lives in the black and white imaginary as a cosmopolitan event that attracts both the lower and upper classes of society. The expressions of black culture evident in the social environment increased the currency of Harlem as a place for many whites where they would go at nights to satisfy their fantasies and desires and then return to their homes in Manhattan, uncontaminated by the wild manners of this immoral crowd. Many white Americans treated the Harlem experience as “other” because they did not want to see the reflection of themselves in the reality of Harlem’s culture. But more importantly, it was the unregulated nature of its culture that frightened American whites more than anything. Harlem’s atmosphere, it should be noted, was abundant with names and symbols that reflected what Langston Hughes saw as “melting pot Harlem – Harlem of honey and chocolate and caramel and rum and vinegar and lemon and lime and gall” (“My Early Days in Harlem” 62). McKay’s focus on the vibrant and often times conflicting diversity of Harlem echoes exactly what

Hughes sees as “West Indian Harlem-warm rambunctious sassy, remembering Marcus Garvey. Haitian Harlem, Cuban Harlem, little pockets of tropical dreams in alien tongues” (Hughes 63). Indeed, McKay’s text captures this diversity by highlighting (through Ray’s Haitian/West Indian background, Madame Suarez’s Cuban identity, Rose’s gender bending dancing partner, (91) Strawberry Lip’s bisexuality, Felice’s prostitution and the ofays slumming from downtown) the paradoxes of Harlem’s cultures, subjectivities, bodies and expressions.

Harlem is a creole space in Hughes’ imagination and a mongrel center where different experiences and conditions merge in competition, transition, performance, and negotiation. This is the Harlem of Jake’s imagination and the same Harlem that provokes a vagabond and maroon consciousness capable of a fearless and unashamed celebration of his humanity. Jake’s return to this maroon space calls up the memory of roots that are material to the practice of masculinities or being. The mythology and mystique central to the performance rituals in the place are the things that capture Jake’s imagination and promulgate him into a series of negotiations that facilitate the freedoms that only Harlem allows. It is important to note that Jake is fully committed to this mythology because he does not have the ability to live in any other, especially as he himself is uprooted from his southern life and his “adventure” in Europe proves empty. Harlem is a black metropolis throbbing with the roots of not just Jake’s past but an ancestral folk culture echoing in the city’s ways of life.

These roots enable a blues aesthetics that pull the protagonist into a world that is primitive (an underworld where the science of survival creates maroon arts) and modern in its sensibilities. Jake goes on a journey into the maroon consciousnesses present in the

city and, even though his sensibilities are complex, his journey helps to shed light on the ways in which the black metropolis signals a defiant style that comes from this migrant class. In this class lives the ambiguity that shows a community in flux and which, even in its familiar state as a home-space to Jake, still promises adventure and independence, or real life. Thus, he comments, “Harlem! Harlem! Where else could I have all this life but Harlem! (14). In its negotiation of the “primitive” and the “modern” Harlem constitutes an open-ended performative space modes of respectability, ones which become templates that shape the meanings and values placed on black male subjectivities in this environment.

Jake seems to challenge the meaning of respectability: he accepts and celebrates not in part but the whole, the urban space marked by the legacies of American racial contact, economics, and conflict. He moves with skill and confidence into the streets, into workplaces and the bars of Harlem. He is not intimidated by the physical or social challenges of this world, neither is he “dis-eased” by its inhabitants. He is Harlem and he is not ashamed of the ramifications and the manifestations of this knowledge; this is the source of his own personal powers and the confidence behind his negotiations, personal and political. He sees himself in the community, neither as a spectator nor part of a show, but as a conductor, an innovator, and a maker of his own sensibilities, stories and cultural habits. To exist in Harlem in this manner, as a figure within the imagination and platform of the city, is what Jake sees as the ultimate representation of respectability. It imagines the representation of what I term “manself” – a kind of masculine subjectivity that is performed and reiterated in the self-fashioning that his freedom allows. The narrator calls upon this confidence, this self-fashioning, when he describes Jake’s desire to “throw

himself up as if to catch the air pouring down from the blue sky” (25). The metaphor is the metaphor of tightrope walking, the spectacular act of negotiating the slippery elements of the liminal and “the air.”

This moment is extended even further when Jake says:

The niggers done plowed through Hundred and Thirtieth Street. Heading straight foh One Hundred and Twenty-fifth. Spades beyond Eight Avenue. Going, going, going to Harlem! Going up! Nevah befoh I seed so many dickty shines in sich swell motor cars. Plenty moh nigger shops. Seventh Avenue done gone high-brown. O Lawdy! Harlem bigger, Harlem better...and sweeter (26 -27).

The tone is the tone of the (maroon as) trickster, superbly, robustly laughing and satisfied with the city not only because it is a familiar space, but also because the images he sees complement his social, cultural and personal character. While these descriptions are born from his observance and celebration of the place, they are also tied to his own self-indulgent masculine subjectivity. With Harlem heading straight “for One Hundred and Twenty-fifth” and “going, going, going” he recognizes the space as having the same pride and audacity that he displays in his negotiation through Harlem’s social milieu. Suddenly, the size of Harlem, “Harlem bigger” is a language for describing Jake’s confidence. The comparative adjective “Harlem better” echoes his expansive emotional state, which aggrandizes in the same way the geographical bounds of the city spread toward Manhattan, threatening to envelop the white world beyond with its “darker, noisier, smellier” self. This break in the city’s borders also echoes a symbolic surge in

black pride, black self, black expression, and black maleness galvanized in the maroon-like consciousness that feeds the Harlem Renaissance.

The linguistic performance of Harlem in the words quoted above is typical of Jake's recognition of the city as already a maroon space while simultaneously framing it in his own image. It is also typical of the linguistic self-aggrandizement and subterfuge of black male (maroon) sensibility¹⁷ and it points to how allegiance to self-making is the maroon's most urgent priority. Even as the runaways from the plantations greeted the already free space of the mountains and forests as a space of possibility for their own free reshapings, Jake greets Harlem as a space that he will chart, extend and refashion. On another occasion, early after his arrival, he exclaims, "Harlem! Harlem! Where else could I have all this life but in Harlem? Good old Harlem! Chocolate Harlem! Sweet Harlem! Harlem *I've got you' number down* (14, emphasis mine). Jake's question rhetoricizes the foundation upon which his masculine performance is built. The question thus implies that here in Jake's mind and in the images he sees in Harlem, it is he, his imperfect, human self, that is reflected, a self that pertains to a masculine character situated within and part of a believable and accessible manly social authority.

The question therefore links Harlem to a proactive masculine being that is not displaced by nation or race but enhanced by the hegemony that marronage provides. Here in Harlem, masculinity is neither threatening nor diseased in accordance with white racist stereotypes of classist black prescriptions. It belongs; it is at home. By juxtaposing the specific adjectives with the series of exclamation points, McKay effectively contextualizes the protagonist's idealization of the place. Indeed, the exclamations

¹⁷ See for example, Roger Abrahams *The Man of Words in the West Indies*; Forbes, *From Nation to Diaspora*, Rohlehr *Calypso and Society in Pre-Independence Trinidad*, for their treatment of gender in Caribbean culture and society.

hyperbolize Jake's profound sense of belonging and belief that it is only here that he can put on a powerful display of manhood. The declarative "Harlem, I've got you number down" records a seizure of ownership based on his view of his ability to comprehend and negotiate the city, as well as play himself within it. The rehearsal, display and *utterance* of manhood as spectacular linguistic hyperbole is to be understood as one facet of the hybridized Caribbean/African American performance of masculinity with which McKay invests his protagonist, and it speaks to a form of creole folk artistry that is already literary in its underpinnings. Within this display echo the saga boy, the Midnight Robbers of Caribbean carnival, the African American jazzman,¹⁸ the calypsonian's sweet tongue that through *picing* irony disguises and laughs at his own self-aggrandizement. It segues directly into another aspect of Jake's masculinity: his sense of himself as a sexual being.

The display of masculine authority is marked by a very important shift in Jake's interaction with and desire to be in Harlem. From the opening lines of the novel, one is introduced to the sex in the city and anticipates the pleasure it not only gives Jake but also how much it drives his hetero-normative masculine subjectivity. Thus, Jake's longing for Harlem finds metonymic expression in the longing he has for the "chocolate brown and walnut-brown girls"(8) "who were calling him just as much as Fifth Avenue, Lenox Avenue, and One Hundred and Thirty-fifth Street" (8). His desire for "them legs! Them tantalizing brown legs! Brown girls rouged and painted like dark pansies. Brown flesh draped in soft colorful clothes. Brown lips full and pouted for sweet kissing. Brown

¹⁸ See Herman Gray's discussion of the role of black jazz players like Miles Davis and John Coltrane, "black jazzmen," who challenged some of the "dominant cultural assumptions about masculinity and whiteness." Gray's essay, "Black Masculinity and Visual Culture," discusses the production of a dynamic black male subjectivity through the music and personal styles of these jazzmen. See also Gordon Rohlehr's *Calypso and Society in Pre-Independence Trinidad* for a discussion of the saga boy and Midnight Robber subjectivities.

breasts throbbing with love” (8) may be read as his “imaginative reconstruction of [t]his environment” (Wirth-Nesher 6) where his aim is to arrive at a meaningful vocabulary that affords him relevance in this competitive space.

For part of Harlem’s vocabulary is its sensuality and sexuality, expressed in provisional acts that give currency to one way in which Jake displays his manhood and desire for a home-space. The fact is that he does seek to find in one of these brown girls someone who will help create a “home” with him. This ends up being the trajectory of the narrative (if anything in this peripatetic novel can be called a trajectory) soon after Jake arrives in Harlem as he meets a prostitute, falls in love with her and in the rest of the novel spends his time searching for her even though she has disappeared after one night with him. In the process of searching for his “unrespectable” love interest, and in his utter and unwavering commitment to her, Jake emblemizes what the meaning of black manhood is for McKay. In this model of black manhood can be found McKay’s quiet opposition to middle class elitism.

McKay is clearly uneasy with the bourgeois preconceptions of his black peers, for he came from and identified, both in his fiction and poetry, with a working class community. *Home to Harlem*, in demonstrating McKay’s anti-bourgeois sensibilities, foregrounds new valences for interrogating black masculinities within the context of emerging black metropolitan enclaves: the ways in which gender and sexuality functioned as a lens through which blacks could meditate upon compelling notions of “race and identity as a philosophical and existential concern” (Taylor 13). McKay is determined to increase the visibility of the folk and thereby reject the silence on black sexuality and gender imposed by Harlem Renaissance leaders. Indeed, his representation

of Jake as a maroon character mandates a new version and vision of black life and culture that helps to explain some of the contradictions brought on from the great migration from the North and the migration of blacks from African shores, the Caribbean, and South America. Black masculinity therefore, according McKay's depiction of Jake's movement through Harlem's various borders, demanded new ways of interpreting race and identity, not from inside but now from below, the realm of the working classes, what Mikhail Bakhtin refers to as the "material bodily stratum" (*Rabelais and His World* 369) and Kamau Brathwaite in the Caribbean context recognizes as the submarine/subterranean space of the self-in-marronage (*Contradictory Omens*).

In a very real sense, the form of McKay's novel speaks to this new interpretation of black reality in a way that the purveyors of canonicity could not have anticipated. McKay was socially and politically motivated to use a novelistic form that was not in keeping with the style that many African Americans were applying at the time of the Harlem Renaissance when this novel was published. He was experimenting with a narrative style that was intent on representing the "voice" and character of the social and cultural environment that he saw or lived in. The documentary and episodic style evident in the structure of the *Home to Harlem*, highlights and dramatizes this experimentation. The chapters in the text ignore chronology and are character, place and event driven. McKay breaks up the text into three parts to produce a narrative structure that highlights and signifies on the migrations in the text, first Jake from Harlem, then Ray and finally Jake and Felice. One must note that these parts convey the idea that the text is arranged like a musical score, especially when one considers that the two major players are Jake and Ray who have different "parts" or roles in the novel. This particular consideration

makes sense when Harlem was a place where jazz and blues music defined the life of blacks and whites during the 1920's. McKay's interest in the music of blacks and the role it played in defining the black masculine subjectivity must have influenced his second novel, *Banjo or a Story without a Plot* (1929). In addition, McKay represented his Caribbean sensibilities in his writing, using language (slang, phonetics), "Bitch is bobbin in you sistah's coffin" (96), "she come boxing me up ovah a dutty black Merican coon" (97) to echo the theatrical or carnival experience that is tangible in Caribbean art, music, and culture. Characters such as Jake are ambiguous forms because they are creole constructions on the page moving between consciousnesses outside of any static conventions of time, geography, or ideology.

Jake's celebration of sexuality, like his linguistic excursions upon the geographies of Harlem, self-consciously plays the saga boy, a fashionable, showy, and stylish Caribbean man who captures the attention of all who sees him because of his larger than life persona. As the saga boy, Jake believes in himself as much as he believes in his personal style, and his masculine subjectivity is supported by Harlem's psycho-social structure that enables the function of his respectability. Thus, he negates any possibility that, though considered spectacular, he will be regarded as a spectacle. To all intents and purposes, he expects to be spectacular and he commits to negotiating his manself in Harlem because his instincts and his actions test the skill of his manself subjectivity as a creative enterprise, based on trust and independence he draws from the social atmosphere of Harlem. In addition, as the tone of the assertion quoted below demonstrates, he is not afraid of falling or failing because, in the same way that the tight rope walker must trust

her instincts and her skills, Jake is aware that as a citizen in this home-space, if he falls or fails, it will become a spectacular, ultimate event. For he

was a high favorite wherever he went. There was something so naturally beautiful about his presence that everybody liked and desired him. Buddies on the slightest provocation, were ready to fight for him, and the girls liked to make an argument around him

That was his natural way, wherever he went, whatever new people he met. It had helped him over many a bad crossing at Brest at Havre and in London...Take Life easy...take life easy. Sometimes he was disgusted with life, but he was never frightened of it (103-5).

On one level, Jake is the subject of desire for “everybody,” both males and females, blacks and whites, and at another level, his representation is a meditation on his legacy as a maroon. It is a legacy that is informed by the maroon’s need to have “the basic cultural knowledge necessary for [his/her] physical adaptation”¹⁹ to his/her environments. In order for this adaptation to take place, the Maroons had to bring with them to the forests, like Jake to Harlem, relevant “cultural equipment” (Price 26. In the same way that the maroons brought to the forests their knowledge gained from their cultural experiences in Africa, Jake’s popularity is born from his experience as a cosmopolitan man whose experiences in the South, in the army and abroad (England and France) have served to give his masculine performance currency in Harlem. Jake uses this experience or “cultural equipment” to bolster his charm and desirability in Harlem.

¹⁹ Richard Price. *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*. In his introduction, “Maroons and their Communities,” Price discusses some of the ways in which Maroons developed various strategies to ensure their survival in the forests. In addition to having knowledge of the terrain, they used guerrilla tactics to adapt to their new homes and counter the militia that the European powers used against them.

Jake is not objectified in this relationship of desire because he is using this technology, this set of tools, rooted in the active and passive resistance of slaves to the condition of slavery. In Jake's case, what are these tools? They can be seen in his ability to charm and practice confidence even in the face of the severe constraints, objectification, competition, and oppression that circumscribe black life, including his own personal life, in America. In the same way he had been able to negotiate between potential hostilities on board the ship, Jake is able to retain his spectacular charm and balance in the face of orchestrated hostilities in Harlem, where African American men are often pitted against Caribbean men in bitter ethnic rivalry.

Jake draws on the tradition of confidence inherent in the maroon acts present on slave plantations in the American South or the Caribbean. Jake is a confidence man, a trickster even, as well as a charmer, and one who carries himself with a certain dignity. McKay's description of Jake's charm addresses another aspect of maroon legacy. Indeed, Jake uses this technology to negotiate new worlds with greater ease, not because he is living as a free spirit, but because his manself is "never frightened" by the risks involved in negotiating, whether it be "a bad crossing at Brest at Havre in London" (105) or escaping death in Harlem (325-329). Like the "something" that is naturally beautiful about his presence, the "it" here is the trace of masculine pride passed on over time from the plantations to metropolitan centers and based in the interactions of many different conflicts or challenges.

Jake's "rough charm" separates him from Billy Biasse or Zeddy and makes up an important part of his existential reality. It also fuels his desire to discover new selves integral to his innovation and masculine performance. Harlem, as a complex metropolitan

space, one bounded by the white parasitic world of lower Manhattan, is the exoticised black belt of the USA. It represents a world of extremes and it demands the legacy of these years of negotiations done on the plantations of the South, the Caribbean and in the bellies of slave-ships sailing the Atlantic. Jake feeds off this legacy, not in terms of a metaphoric absolutism, but as a pluralistic testimony to the workings of a black vernacular and a burgeoning diaspora. The power of this vernacular textures Jake's life as belonging to an "urban density, refinement, and complexity, inner momentum of conviction and poise sent spiraling out into the world, overcoming accidents of class, status, and political oppression" (Farris Thompson xiv). Further, Jake's manself is obviously textured with a worldly complexion that imbues him with the powers of a New World explorer, not through technologies of violence but through force of personality: we are told his "rough charm could conquer anything" (104) even as he moved from speak-easy to buffet flat to cabaret.

Ray's entrance in Part two of the novel radically expands and complicates the range of maroon masculinities available to and present in the city, allowing a platform for a more positive critique of the racial and literary shibboleths of the Renaissance. Ray's presence in Harlem carries with it a certain style that is the opposite of Jake's spectacular virility and subjectivity. Ray is a Haitian immigrant, an intellectual, and an idealistic transnational being. He appears in both *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo* as a maroon character who for a number of reasons rooted in his outsider-insider status asserts only a tentative masculinity upon Harlem's socio-cultural and literary scenes. One of the first things to notice about Ray is that he represents an as yet unknown quantity, a form of masculine persona that is outside the self-conscious experience of a Harlem that, despite its maroon

personality, has been contaminated by the seepage from the outer circle of plantation (white America's) values. This seepage, the negative side of creolization and the risk inherent in tightrope walking between worlds, includes the ideologies of race, Americanness and what I will term "provincial space" – the belief that American is defined by a finite set of referents bounded by the geographical limits of the nation state.

Ray's character asserts a new kind of masculinity through the act of speaking, not as a New Negro per se, but as a trope of and for the diaspora. His presence in this novel compounds the interrogation of the "home-space" in so far as in his role as mentor and teacher he helps Jake to extend the terrain of his self-representations. Further, by punctuating and puncturing the boundedness of the American nation, he insists on a more profound aesthetics to describe who or what "black" within an American context is. Indeed, McKay is suggesting through Ray's actions that this definition should urge a "broader global consciousness connecting them to black populations in the colonial world" (Stephens, 45). By representing Ray as a maroon who has knowledge of "alternative forms and processes of identification" (Stephens, 45), McKay also suggests what Martin Delaney emphasizes in his apocalyptic novel *Blake; or the Huts of America* that blacks manage their subjectivities without reservation or compunction for expectations of white hegemony and imperialism.

In light of the role he will play in the novel, it is of major importance that Ray hails from Haiti, a space exemplifying the clash between maroon and imperial histories: the Revolution, plotted underground, that heralded into being the second free state in the New World and the first black republic in colonial history. Haiti is also a space that remembers the aftermath of serial punishments, including the 1915 US invasion and

occupation that culminated in the massacre of 1934. McKay critiques US neo-imperialism through the ironic characterization of Ray as a displaced Caribbean intellectual whose life is sent into disarray and into the borders of the USA as a result of this occupation. John Lowney asserts that “while Haitians composed a small minority of Caribbean immigrants to Harlem, McKay’s exposure of the devastating impact of the American invasion of Haiti underscored the necessity for a renewed counter-hegemonic pan-Africanist solidarity” (“Haiti and Black Nationalism” 2). Haiti’s political future of “self determination” was supposedly at the center of Harlem intellectual debate, yet, ironically, Ray’s ideas in McKay’s text show the insular trajectory of black nationalism that became an imperative in Harlem during the 1920’s. Ray is used to demonstrate how far removed Haitian, and by extension Caribbean history and culture, were from the consciousness of ordinary Americans and specifically of black Americans like Jake.

When we first meet Ray, he is working as a waiter on the railroad; he is described as an outsider sitting “alone at a small table. He was reading. He was average size, slim, a smooth pure ebony with straight features and a suggestion of whiskers” (127). The distance that exists between Ray and the other waiters coupled with the particular attitudes toward sexual difference in the black belt soon becomes crystallized in Ray’s exchange with Jake. Jake’s curious inquiry produces the information that the book Ray is reading is by a French writer, Alphonse Daudet, the author of *Sappho*. Ray, the inveterate teacher-scholar, tells Jake the story of another Sappho, the poet from Lesbos, and introduces him to the origin of the words “Sapphic and Lesbian.” Then Jake shows a level of insensitivity that is reserved for those who live a queer identity in Harlem’s world. Jake describes lesbians as “bulldyers” and further states “thems all ugly

womens.” To which Ray replies “Not at all. And that’s a damned ugly name. Harlem is too savage about some things” (129).

Ray can identify with the lesbian queer in McKay’s *Black Harlem* because he enters the novel under a “queer” gaze, both a foreigner and an intellectual. His West Indianness implies a black subjectivity that is not necessarily embraced as “black enough” in some African American contexts. Hence he enters the space under suspicion as an interloper.

McKay uses this scene to not only to preface the particular gaps or tensions and even bifurcations that define the diaspora but to also account for the need for solidarity within the diaspora. This solidarity is not necessarily to build a nation but more to draw attention to the shared histories, cultures and experiences that bind blacks in and outside the United States together. Jake is shocked to learn that Ray is a French speaking Negro: “Don’t crap me, ain’tchu – ain’tchu one of us, too?” (131) The question interrogates the meaning of the Caribbean black in the imagination of African Americans. In this moment, Ray becomes a maroon-like persona, living on the edge of a culture even while being a living part of it. Not only is he not assigned a place in Jake’s world but also Jake wonders if he is “authentic” or black enough. Jake does not have the “global” knowledge that Ray possesses and thus cannot see or imagine the African diaspora, the transnational, the intercultural or to use Paul Gilroy’s terms, the Black Atlantic. In that sense, when Ray tells Jake he is from “Hayti,” Jake responds “Hayti...Hayti. That’s where now?” (131) Ray tells him that it is “an island in the Caribbean – near the Panama Canal” (131). Carolyn Cooper describes this moment as an example of how Ray cunningly employs geography to locate Hayti “near the Panama Canal [in order to] generously facilitate

Jake's awakening from ignorance" ("No Matter Where You Come From: Pan-Africanist Consciousness in Caribbean Popular Culture" 3). Cooper comments:

Like Harlem, the Panama Canal is a potent Pan-Africanist signifier. Indeed, 'Panama' becomes a metaphor for the bridging of African diasporic cultures in the Americas.

Though the canal explosively severed the umbilical cord that once joined two continents, it also, somewhat paradoxically, engendered cultural continuities. Produced by the labor of so many re-migrant African peoples, the canal now separates continents and, simultaneously, joins the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean – itself the site of other African diasporas both ancient and modern. Another Middle Passage in this place where so many dispossessed Africans risked their lives for the opportunity to make a living, there was created another vibrant meeting-place of African cultures (3).

The train that Ray and Jake work on replicates this provenance of the Canal as a realm of diaspora; it is a meeting site where migrant men work, communicate, conflict, exchange barbs and jokes, ideas and knowledge. Maroon-like, it is a site of continuity and discontinuity, an inner world predicated within the larger geographies of the city and the state, and the place where Jake emerges into a wider knowledge. It is on the train that Ray introduces Jake to a "world of revolution, of black power and military sophistication that challenges his stereotypes about Africans and Caribbean peoples" (Cooper 2). McKay proclaims in the novel that

Jake was very American in spirit and shared a little of that comfortable Yankee contempt for poor foreigners. And as an American Negro he looked askew at

foreign niggers. Africa was jungle, and Africans bush niggers, cannibals. And West Indians were monkey-chasers. But now he felt like a boy who stands with the map of the world in colors before him, and feels the wonder of the world (134).

Even as McKay uses this instance to highlight the suspicious attitude of the American black toward the Caribbean and the consequent double marronage of the latter, he also highlights how Jake's already maroon sensibility allows him to accommodate the new knowledge Ray brings him. Indeed, in response, Jake experiences a transformation of consciousness. McKay's narrator expresses this expansion of Jake's psychological horizon, in which he now sees himself as a man in a larger maroon community, in accents of allusive irony. Like the boy who "stood in his shoes and...wondered", Jake allows himself the innocence of wonder as he discovers this brave new world of maroon tradition and history. Indeed, with map in hand, he claims it for himself as Columbus claimed the Caribbean as "marvelous possessions"²⁰ but more so as the maroon might have claimed the open territories of the hills and forests to which he had escaped.

The cartographic metaphor speaks to Jake's claiming of new psychological terrain as well as new space within which to perform with confidence his spectacular black masculine body: the terrain is plangent with the bright colors and wonder of the tightrope walker's successful balancing act. The moment is epiphanic because Jake realizes he is part of a geographic script that does not include only the USA. Indeed, what is evident here is that Ray is a cartographer who helps to remake Jake's small world to include other geographies. He is given a new way of conceptualizing himself within the trauma of

²⁰ See Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (1991) for example, pp. 68, 72-79, 80, 85. Here Greenblatt discusses the political implications of this term in Columbus's Diaries.

slavery, discrimination, and dispossession. Ray in effect empowers Jake with a history that is not about “bondage” but one that celebrates the Caribbean as the origin of American values of freedom and maroon subjectivity.

While Ray initiates Jake into a global history that spans Liberia, Haiti, and Ethiopia, inevitably, the key story that he tells Jake is the tragic yet triumphant history of the Haitian Revolution’s Toussaint L’Ouverture. In response, Jake discovers not only diasporan space but new masculine models for him to copy. Jake rejoices: “A black man! A black man! Oh I wish I’d been a soldier under sich a man!” (132). This comment shows him revisiting, vindicating and making sense of the ways he had previously expressed his African American masculinity and sense of self. He is now obviously rehearsing his experience in Europe and the reason he left the army in Europe and sought his way back the United States. He had traveled through circles of flight, negotiation and rebellion against containment, in the tradition of an unknown community to which he had belonged. Jake recognizes and claims a spectacular legacy among spectacular men. His exultation is the realization of a victory and a celebration of his stake in that victory; he expands into a new sense of self as part of what Carolyn Cooper calls an “epic victory [that] constitutes a formidable contestation of the divide-and-rule politics of global Euro-American cultural imperialism” (“Erotic Marronage: Embodying Emancipation in Jamaican Dancehall Culture” 3). McKay’s presentation through Ray of diasporic narrative as a form of travel, or container that carries the legacy of manhood in its hold, is spectacular. It draws on a history of marronage as travel under siege, but with cunning.

Of importance here is the fact that the black diaspora which Ray offers as a place of maroon refuge where Jake is initiated into a Pan-Africanist consciousness, is not one

based on rehearsals of victimhood. Ray's tutelage exemplifies Carolyn Cooper's argument that the "bonds between Africans across the globe" should not be described in a manner of speaking as just a "fatalistically shared history of bondage" (*Erotic Marronage: Embodying Emancipation in Jamaican Dancehall Culture* 3). This remains true despite the tragic aspects of Ray's personal history that bring him and Jake into brotherhood. This brotherhood is brought home to Jake quite forcefully by Ray's revelation that "Uncle Sam put me here." Jake finds it hard to believe that they might share the same plight of displacement and "homelessness." He tells Ray, "don't hand me that bull" (137). But again Ray takes the time to educate Jake and tell him about the 1915 US invasion of Haiti, which his father opposed, as a result of which he lost his job and his brother was killed. Ray emerges as American as Jake because his narrative emphasizes the manner in which his story and that of the Caribbean shapes the American black nation. Jake acknowledged this when, in an earlier passage, the narrator said that Jake had co-opted the word "bumhole" into his personal vocabulary, the night he witnessed two West Indian women fighting at the Congo (130). "Bumhole," a Caribbean expletive, is a variation of the Jamaican expletive rasshole, and replaces "such expressions as "Bull," "bawls," "walnuts," and "blimey" (130).

This migration of words across borders where Jake had previously closed against the encroachment of French ("Don't crap me, ain'tchu – ain'tchu one of us?") re-emphasizes McKay's questions about US notions of ethnicity, nation and citizenship. Gary Holcomb suggests in his provocative treatise on McKay's work that "Ray blends the history and struggle of African and diaspora people with the international struggle against imperialism, promoting in Jake's mind the idea that he belongs to a race as well

as a global struggle of workers” (34). Holcomb’s statement however elides an important aspect of Ray’s politics: his disgust with race and the American obsession with it. This disgust evinces his refusal of allegiances based on ideological prescriptions and instantiates his maroon sensibility: a passionate attachment to masculine subjectivity based on individual consciousness and individual choice. Disgusted with the filth that he has to live in while on a stop over in Pittsburgh, Ray wonders about the reason why

these men claimed kinship with him. They were black like him. Man and nature had put them in the same race. He ought to love them and feel them (if they felt anything). He ought to if he had a shred of social morality in him. They were all chained ganged together and he was counted as one link. Yet he loathed every soul in that great barrack-room, except Jake. Race... Why should he have and love a race? (153)

This depiction of Ray’s anti-absolutism widens out into another critique of the Harlem Renaissance. McKay suggests that the Harlem Renaissance not only forgot the underclass, but also erased the contributions of migrants from the diaspora. Ray is clearly the quintessential “New Negro,” boasting a knowledge that is vast and eclectic, schooled in French and classical literature, African history and culture. Ray’s character presents a cosmopolitan voice and texture that is the opposite of the very brash, virile, and traditional sense of manliness Jake exudes. Thus, Ray’s entrance signals not just a change in the style of the narrative, its structure and its voice (the narrative now becomes more serious in its tone). Ray is a far more the critical and philosophical figure and this profile follows and shapes the narrative. With Ray’s entrance in the novel, Jake’s story now becomes intertwined with Ray’s story, as their journeys are parallel to each other. In fact,

the text becomes a more intimate experience and exploration of black politics in Harlem during the 1920's.

The profound difference between Jake and Ray, however, is the latter's inhabiting of a personal subjectivity that marks him bodily and psychologically off from Jake. (For the diasporan maroon space that Ray offers to Jake cannot be understood as a difference between them, but rather as a space of commonality, or community that had been hidden from Jake). Ray's masculine subjectivity does not seem to have that same virility as Jake's and he does not perform with the same fluidity around women as Jake does. As a matter of fact, while he does not criticize Jake for the way he treats women, Ray cannot sexualize them as Jake does and neither can he engage in sexual acts without emotion and find pleasure in the experience. There is a version of respectability that Ray asserts in his masculine persona which has nothing to do with a fear of women or a rejection of them. Ray's inability to perform with the same hetero-normative confidence or predatory passion as Jake and yet maintain their friendship is a testimony to the social skills that he brings to this relationship. He is more cosmopolitan, a thinker, and a dignified Haitian.

This is what many critics are missing when they are quick to assign a simplistic queer subjectivity to Ray without looking at the complex nature of his character in the novel. Ray's critique and holding of himself apart from certain activities sheds light on the kinds of destructive practices – for example, Ray's disgust at the seeing how Madame Laura allows her son to witness the world of prostitution as if it is a normal part of his existence (192-193) or drinking recklessly or doing drugs because it is available (150-153)) – existing in urban spaces such as Harlem or Pittsburgh where the forces of vice and poverty add another challenge to the mobility of the Northern black. Ray's

masculine diffidence is not permitted in the hyper-masculine and competitive world of the city. He cannot advertise his masculinity as he can his intellect and thus fails to control the performative environment as well as Jake. He admits that he does not have the same luck with women as his friend and that he envies Jake's comfort and fluidity in the life of the "underworld" especially because "he could not pick up love easily on the street as Jake" (152).

Jake therefore describes Ray as "awful queer" (200) and his critique of Ray's masculine subjectivity is part of the reason some critics like Gary Edward Holcomb have suggested that Ray might be homosexual. Yet I think that Ray's queer sensibility is more of a maroon sensibility that allows him to negotiate and deal more healthily than Jake with the unforgiving nature of the racist and hetero-normative world in which he and Jake must live. Ray, therefore, does not carry out his actions with the detachment that Jake exhibits. He feels more intensely than Jake; "his range was wider and he could not be satisfied with the easy things that sufficed Jake" (265). This is natural to him and it helps him to navigate the urban space effectively without Jake's romances. He is touched by the life of Harlem in a "thousand vivid ways" and he regards his own being as "something of a touchstone of the general emotions of the race" (225-266). He could be devastated by the pictures of black men lynched and burned in the Dixie and be elated by "any flash of beauty or the warm rich brown face of a Harlem girl seeking romance" (266).

Ray is concerned that Jake's masculine performance does not have the capacity to "feel those sensations that just turn you back in on yourself and make you isolated and helpless" (200). This is a startlingly unusual declaration of sensibility when placed

against the hyper-masculine bravado of dazzling control that characterizes masculine performance in the popular culture that Jake and Harlem exemplify. The state of marronage seems to be ideologically pitted against any truce with feelings of isolation and helplessness, yet Ray is embracing these as aspects of a larger humanity, or aspects of self submerged (marooned) under the spectacular, mythologized dazzle of rebellion. Ray's ability to embrace such "feminine" feelings then inaugurates another way for black male subjectivity to be within the "underworld," and shows that McKay does not intend to project any single masculine subjectivity as a prototype for blacks in America. Ray's particular emotional sensibility is the source of his dis-ease among some of the practices in Harlem, signified in his being turned off by "some nasty perfume on [a prostitute]" that turned his stomach. Therefore, Ray's queer sensibility is an opportunity for distancing himself and escaping from the "dis-eased" environment that surrounds him. His helplessness at this level is the extent of his own dis-ease because he does not pretend that this world and its material or sexual acts can satisfy him. Hence, he is a misfit, a queer, a maroon.

Included in Ray's queer subjectivity is his knowledge that Jake and he are living in a modern world that requires "new methods of living" (206). For McKay himself, modernity as a medium of change and political will, demand that black masculinities, a traditionally persecuted and mismanaged subjectivity, be sufficiently responsible, able and engaged with the material and cultural changes in the urban space. Indeed, it is crucial for these men to practice other strategies necessary to reform, not the ways of white folks, but the ways of black folks and their retentions of a subordinated black manhood. In other words, McKay suggests that modernity, as a cultural event, requires

that black males be healthy in order to contend with the hysteria that surrounds their subjectivity in the imagined spaces of the United States, Europe and the diaspora. For Ray, masculine performance as excess may be spectacular but can also test the limits of a healthy personal responsibility. Ray then informs Jake that the time for going on “like a crazy ram goat as if [he were] living in the Middle Ages” (206) has passed and it is time for him to stop being ashamed of what he lacks and understand it within the context of a larger political and cultural experience.

So, when Ray visits Jake while he is recovering from being ill with venereal disease, Jake comments that, when he was in the army, they used to give him all sorts of lectures about “canshankerous nights and prophet-lactic days, but he never paid them no mind” (206). He thought “them things was for edjucated fellohs like you who lives in you’ head” (206). Ray seeks to help Jake to see that he cannot live like a sailor who “don’t know nothing about using a compass” and who still hopes to “hit a safe port” (207). His catching of venereal disease undermines the romance of his masculine invincibility and reveals the tightrope risk at the heart of his masculine behavior. Ray tells him that his masculinity should not be dependent on risks that are to the detriment of his body and mind, which are just as valuable as that of a “book fellah”:

Those devices that you despise are really for you rather than for me or people like me, who don’t live your kind of free life. If you, and the whole strong race of workingman who love freely like you, don’t pay some attention to them, then you’ll all wither away and rot like weeds (207).

Maroon consciousness and technology, Ray is implying, are essentially paradigms of modernity, since they are driven by the forces of adaptation and the ability to seize the opportune moment.

The irony inherent in Ray's quiet, unobtrusive guarding of a marooned subjectivity that does not fit into Harlem's scheme of things is that in its own way it renders him spectacular, gazed upon as a man of mystery and for that reason endlessly attractive to both men and women in Harlem. How Ray manages to negotiate the city without becoming submerged in it, maintaining a distance that is both critique and preservation of self; what psychological space he inhabits as intellectual, educated man and artist; what impulses he carries in a body that abjures the bodies of women yet does not seem to be involved with men, these are some of the questions Ray's presence raises that identify him further with the covert, ambiguous operations of marronage. Ray is under a covert kind of Foucauldian surveillance from Harlem that ironizes Harlem itself as the carrier of plantation culture.

When placed against his empowering role in Jake's life, Ray's masculine subjectivity is not without other ambiguities and uneasy complications. These serve to highlight further, and in different ways than in Jake's case, the fraught terrains of marronage within the context of creolization and tightrope walking. We have seen where Jake's homophobia and initial intra-racism revealed fissures in his model of black manhood. And Jake is quietly aware of this inadequacy because his actions after his dismissal of black "queers" gestures toward a capacity to learn or grow into knowledge about this masculine subjectivity. So even as he hums the lines "And there are two things in Harlem I don't understan' It is a bulldyking woman and a faggoty man," (129) the

character who emerges in the next line is “a child that does not know its letters, [who] turned the pages of the novel” (129). Here is an impressionable being, one who has the potential to ask questions and look for answers that might lead him into knowledge. This description of Jake is indicative of a desire to learn from a new text, one that offers him more options to read the world. Ray is this new text; he comes self-consciously into the narrative with an air of confidence and eventually draws our attention to Jake’s insecure hyper-masculinity.

But Ray himself is an enigma. And this, too, is part of the maroon presentation, which is also both a trickster and a border crosser, an improviser who shape shifts with the contingencies of the moment and holds allegiance principally to his own freedoms and survival, even at the expense of the freedoms of others (the peace treaties of the Jamaican maroons with the British involved negotiations for maroons to capture other runaway slaves for the British). To this extent ambiguity becomes a settled part of the maroon persona. As Kamau Brathwaite indicates in *Contradictory Omens*, creolization as a function and process of shape-shifting and border crossing does not come without pitfalls, risks or disfigurement. Ray’s enigma encapsulates some of these issues.

His refusal of racial allegiances is one example of this ambiguity. McKay uses Ray’s character to unravel the absolutism that racism imposes on the black man but that robs him of some of his power to articulate an autonomous consciousness to challenge and therefore imagine other ways of seeing himself and the world. McKay suggests that Ray’s ambiguous feelings about his race are influenced by Western civilization and “the colonialism, imperialism, and materialism brought by it” (107). Later in the novel Ray realizes he could not and did not want to identify with these men who were left impotent

by the grand business called civilization (154). And because he recognized his own impotence in these men, “he hated them for being one of them” especially as before the US invasion of his island home just a decade earlier, he used to feel proud to be the son of a free nation. He used to feel condescendingly sorry for those poor African natives superior to ten millions of suppressed Yankee “coons” (155). The US invasion stripped him of his manhood and left him feeling impotent. He cannot celebrate Haiti’s free state anymore but, worse, he does not have a home or a place of marronage where he can “escape the clutches of that magnificent monster of civilization and retire behind the natural defenses of his island, where the steam-roller of progress could not reach him.” (155). However, “Escape he would” (155) – that is to say, his journey through Harlem and subsequent move to Europe belong to a praxis of flight in search of a lost maroon nation to call home.

Ray’s conflicted subjectivity between uneasy spaces of creolized negotiation is explicated in his class-color profile. He is not fully a part of Jake’s world, yet he is in it and can navigate its boundaries. He is not simply black; he is a mulatto whose roots are Caribbean and furthermore he is part of a rich Caribbean history of freedom and liberation that stands as an example in the Americas of the only successful revolution against slavery. He “possessed another language and literature that they knew not of” (155) but he also spoke the language of these blacks whom his Western civilization and education forced him to despise. Also, he is a member of the working class, yet he is not, because his education and family ties are part of a bourgeois class. Then, he is migrant and cosmopolitan. He is an intellectual albeit an “inhibited, over-civilized intellectual unable to accept the hedonistic life-style of the black world’s Jakes” (Ramesh and Rani

105). Through Ray, McKay examines the meaning of home within the construct of an insecure masculine praxis. His critique shows how the idea of “home” is a difficult temporal space for Ray to navigate because his masculine performance and credibility in a bourgeoisie sense are tied up with class.

It is my argument that on one hand, Ray and Jake represent two sides of McKay, the intellectual and the hedonist. Ray’s mentorship of Jake, his role in helping Jake find a vocabulary for speaking his own/new story, and Jake’s existence as an open mind-space upon which Ray can practice his “writerly” craft, may be read as the fullest extent of reconciliation between these two halves that *Home to Harlem* is able to achieve, suggesting that McKay, with his profound impulse towards autobiography found no final answers in Harlem.²¹ On the other hand, Ray himself is also a split character who helps to problematize any single sided representation of black masculinity. These two warring sides become the extent of the novel’s interesting statement on marronage because the two parts of the novel diverge, when Ray leaves Harlem for Europe and Jake leaves with his “love,” whom he has finally found, to start a life as a “family” man. The incomplete merging of Ray and Jake represents an ongoing search for a maroon reconciliation in which the self

has at its center the exercise of mind variously described as the creative intellect and the creative imagination. These two manifestations of the process work in tandem to produce the finest results worthy of the name innovation...[because] the truly creative producer ...[must] finally discover that there is no unbridgeable gap between intellect and passion, no dichotomy

²¹ Sandra Pouchet Paquet argues that this impulse to Autobiography can be found in much of Anglophone Caribbean writing through out most of the 20th century. See *Caribbean Autobiography: Cultural Identity and Self-Representation*.

between morality and reality, no logical opposition between truth and virtue (Nettleford 39-40).

Ray's final flight at the end of the novel, like McKay's, speaks to this "unfinished genesis of the imagination" (Wilson Harris 1999), the unsatisfied craving for the "revolution of self-perception" (Rohlehr, 1) by "constant affirmation of the validity of the submerged self – the self in maroonage; the marooned submerged and often subversive self" (Rohlehr 1-2). Because he perceives a lack of "complexity" in the life of Harlem, Ray was afraid to become a "Harlem nigger strutting his stuff" (*Home to Harlem* 264) and a spectacle who did not know his nature as a maroon. Yet it is because Ray cannot fully comprehend the "jazz" and "blues" rising out of Harlem and because he does not see his own maroon self in the ambiguity of the very place that he so eagerly wants to leave. Ray's inability to reconcile the two selves in his persona indicates that he does not as yet have the technology as a maroon to walk this tightrope. Thus, at the same time, he hates what he loves and loves what he hates. He reminisces on this dilemma, prior to leaving for Europe:

Going away from Harlem...Harlem! How terribly Ray could hate it sometimes. Its brutality, gang rowdyism, promiscuous thickness. Its hot desires. But, oh, the rich blood-red color of it! The warm accent of its composite voice, the fruitiness of its laughter, the rolling rhythm of its "blues" and the improvised surprises of its jazz. He had known happiness, too, in Harlem, joy that glowed gloriously upon him like the high noon sunlight of his tropic island home (267).

Ray, as the self in marronage, has the desire to instruct through his art, but he must come to terms with his own prejudices and limitations before he can fully realize this process. He wants to find words to “make romance,” so that he can give voice to the people of the underworld: the “waiters, cooks, chauffeurs, sailors, porters, guides, ushers, hod-carriers, factory hands” who “all touched in a thousand ways” (225). Part of his dilemma is figuring how to hone the inspiration of his spiritual masters, Anatole France, Henrik Ibsen, H.G. Wells, and Bernard Shaw to create an art fraught with the humanity and spirit of an emergent maroon consciousness that stands as “a grand anti-romantic presentation of mind and behavior in that hell-pit of life” (227).

Ray’s flight to Europe is part of a quest which he concludes in the sequel *Banjo: A Story without a Plot*. His exploits in this text begin to shed more light on the McKay’s project, unintended or not, in laying the foundation for the attitude and mission of the Négritude Movement. Léopold Sédar Senghor, Léon Damas, Aimé Césaire, and Emile Ollivier are all indebted to McKay for these very reasons. This political and cultural event came to define the movement toward independence by French Caribbean territories and African countries led by writers from both spaces during the post war years. Thus, McKay, like his autobiographical double Ray, has become a post-WWI and pre-independence transnational mediator who, in the words of Michelle Ann Stephens “developed a discourse that explored key features of black transnationality, reimagining black mobility, black nationality and cultural belonging, and the geography of new black economies” (14). In effect, what McKay begins to do in *Home to Harlem* and which he continues in *Banjo* is to detail the emergence of a maroon cosmology that not only births the context and political matter of Négritude but imagines the diaspora as a maroon space

pushed and pulled by the compelling forces of modernity and creolization, a more complex and multifariously contradictory state than W.E.B. Dubois' double consciousness.

Ray's flight is necessary if he is to imagine a masculine subjectivity that can adequately re-interpret race, community, gender and sexuality and eventually negotiate and create a home-space. What better place to disentangle this discourse but Europe, the very center where struggle with his own subjectivity originated. Ray leaves for Europe, not because it houses an escape or a place or refuge or because he believes there is a maroon existence there, but simply because the act of leaving is one of censoring. Here I gladly echo Lilyan Kesteloot who asserts in her book, *Black Writers in French: A Literary History of Negritude*, that "the Negro censures American civilization and [imperialism], not only for its prejudices but also for its oppressive capitalist structure, and the commercial spirit that always places money above men" (63).

By extension, I would assert that Ray's flight is also an attempt to recoup the portrayal of blacks from the pathological state of "problem." As an artist intent on deepening the structures of black subjectivities, McKay creates male characters who are challenges to Western society, to whites and middle class blacks. Indeed, the depiction of poor, unemployed, homeless and sexually active black men in *Home to Harlem* was a challenge to the imagination of a black bourgeoisie community that rejected such representations as racist if done by white writers and conspiratorial if done by black writers. So while McKay's *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo* are self-consciously experimental, his male characters are not experiments; they already exist within the black imagination and McKay uses these male characters to show that black masculine

subjectivity is not closed, monolithic, static, or just middle-class. Therefore, like them, we are invited to observe Ray's flight as an emancipating proposition for black male subjectivities.

CHAPTER TWO

Cosmopolitanism as Marronage in Claude McKay's *Banjo* or *A Story without a Plot*

Charles Dickens begins his novel *Little Dorrit* by describing Marseilles perhaps in universal terms.

Everything in Marseilles, and about Marseilles, had stared at the fervid sky, and been stared at in return, until a staring habit had become universal there. Strangers were stared out of countenance by staring white houses, staring white walls, staring white streets, staring tracts of arid road, staring hills from which verdure was burnt away. The only things to be seen not fixedly staring and glaring were the vines drooping under their load of grapes (1).

Dickens uses “universal” to not only describe the constancy of the “stare” that encompassed everything and everyone in Marseilles, but also to highlight Marseilles as a universe where strangers come from all parts of the world, on this “fierce August day” (1). Dickens’s text reveals a paradoxical environment, one in which difference, foreignness, and foreigners are material for the presence of the universal. Here is a cosmopolis; Marseilles is home, permanent or transient for an international crowd of “Hindoos, Russians, Chinese, Spaniards, Portuguese, Englishmen, Frenchmen, Genoese, Neapolitans, Venetians, Greeks, Turks, descendants of all the builders of Babel, [who] came to trade” (1) at this transnational economic and cultural port. Here is an economy of contact and exchange, a pluralistic environment flush with the substances of migration and trade.

This international crowd that Dickens presents in his 19th century text has uncanny resemblances to Claude McKay's motley crew in *Banjo*, written some 70 years later. Dickens sees this environment as a confusing congregation of nations marked by his reference to them as "descendants of Babel;" McKay takes another perspective. In his autobiography *A Long Way from Home*, he describes his relief to "get to Marseilles, to live among a gang of black and brown humanity" who were from "the United States, the West Indies, North Africa and West Africa...The Africans came mainly from Dahomey and Senegal and Algeria" (277).

This diasporic mélange make up a unique working class population in the port city and even though, as laborers and migrants to the city, they might live betwixt and between transience and permanence, they help sustain the city's cosmopolitan character:

Many were dockers. Some were regular hardworking sailors, who had a few days in port between debarking and embarking. Others were waiting for ships – all wedged in between the old port and the breakwater, among beachcombers, guides, procurers, prostitutes of both sexes and bistro bandits – all of motley making Marseilles, swarming, scrambling and scraping sustenance from the bodies of ships and crews (McKay 277).

The novel's focus on such characters reveals its project to be a continuation of the "unfinished genesis"²² of *Home to Harlem*: the discovery and invention of spaces of "home" that will accommodate subjectivities accustomed to living on the edge, in in-between spaces unmoored from fixities of identity, status and objectification, spaces that allow them to play, camouflage and perform the selves that the moment demands.

²² The term is borrowed from Wilson Harris's – "the unfinished genesis of the imagination" in *Selected Essays*, ed. Andrew Bundy.

Marseilles is a polyglot space marked by the multiples of creolity, plurality and the paradoxes between “relation”²³ and contestation. Convoluted and textured between the traces of white modernity, colonial insurgencies, black foreign nationals, vagabond and troubadour wanderers, and a burgeoning black internationalism and cosmopolitanism born from the impact of not only a black migrant population but also a population of black soldiers who remained in Europe after World War I, Marseilles is the ideal space for marronage as flight, strategic invisibility and the playing out of subjectivity as uncontained desire.

Marseilles allows the elaboration of McKay’s project in a new and more expansive setting than the enclosure of Harlem and the United States. Part of this project, we have seen, is to detach identity from the boundaries of nation and belonging imagined along lines of sameness. In pursuing this project, McKay produces subjectivities rather than identities, diverse characters that, like the historical maroon, constantly defy the attempt to pin them down to prescriptions from the outside. In a much more comprehensive way than the subjects of *Home to Harlem*, *Banjo*’s characters are part of a company of what Michelle Ann Stephens refers to as “the traveling black subject”:

the movements of the traveling black subject, a more worldly New Negro, were not circumscribed within the boundaries of the United States. As a result of their transnational travels, worldly black subjects developed a much broader, more global sense of their own blackness and their relationship to other colonial subjects. They imagined and moved through a black, colonial, and diasporic world, one that existed in the shadows of empire both geographically and imaginatively...We see in the traveling New Negro traces

²³ See Édouard Glissant’s *Poetics of Relation*.

of alternative forms of identification that developed among hybrid, multinational, multiracial populations in the spaces between New and Old Worlds, throughout the centuries of colonial settlement and imperial development (*Black Empire* 58).

Like *Home to Harlem*, *Banjo* expands the definition of these traveling subjects, identifying them specifically as the example of a New (male) Negro, who emerges from below. As Ifeoma Nwanka observes, these purveyors of “black cosmopolitanism” (*Black Cosmopolitanism* 14) articulate new forms of “self definition and self-articulation” that ultimately upend the “expected or imposed understandings of identity” (Nwanko 15). McKay’s motley crew of traveling male subjects offers a black subjectivity rooted in the special circumstances that shaped Marseilles as a burgeoning African diasporic multinational center after World War I.

What *Banjo* does is give a preeminent portrayal of Europe’s migrant underclass who were to become its carnival or submerged (marooned) intellectuals, instrumental political examples and spokespersons who were very vocal about the contradictions and hypocrisies that abounded in France’s notion that there are no ethnicities in France because everyone is French. In effect, *Banjo*, like Samuel Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners* some 20 years later, represents the “chickens come home to roost” who take up residence in the colonizer’s “home.” Jamaican vernacular poet Louise Bennett describes this phenomenon as “colonization in reverse.”²⁴ Drawing upon the meaning of new identity politics prevalent in Britain at the time he was writing, Selvon, like McKay,

²⁴ See Louise Bennett’s popular dialect poem of the same name which deals with the flood of migrants who leave Jamaica for England after the end of the first World War. The manner in which the Jamaicans changed the face of England socially and culturally led Bennett to describe it as kind of reverse colonization. *Jamaica Labrish*. [(Kingston, Jamaica: Sangster’s Book Stores Ltd., 1966)delete] p.179

seeks to present an African diasporic map for understanding a new generation of colonial migrant populations of African descent re-ordering and re-making Europe's social, cultural and political landscape.

Indeed what both texts present is what I consider to be the true "practice of diaspora"²⁵ acts and processes born from and sustained by the use of maroon-like technologies, imported into the migrant space and used to create maroon hegemonies. Such hegemonies are based in part on the migrants' need to describe their subjectivities within the context of their movements, as beings whose imaginings of self are constantly shadowed by the vestiges of empire. As I have indicated in my earlier chapters, the irony of maroon hegemonies and reverse colonizations is their unstable, contingent character. As Glissant writes:

The history of a transplanted population, but one which elsewhere becomes another people, allows us to resist generalization and the limitations it imposes...what makes the difference between a people that survives elsewhere, *that maintains its original nature*, and a population that is transformed elsewhere *into another people* (without, however, succumbing to the reductive pressures of the Other), and that thus enters into the constantly shifting and variable process of creolization (of relationship, of relativity), is that the latter has not brought with it, not collectively continued, the methods of existence and survival, both material and spiritual, which it practiced before being uprooted (Glissant 14,15 emphasis in the original).

²⁵ I borrow the term from the title of Brent Hayes Edwards book *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*.

This chapter examines McKay's treatment of black cosmopolitanism as forms of marronage in his second novel, *Banjo*. Cosmopolitanism in McKay's representation is more than the rejection of national, cultural, or social borders or identity; it is the act of flight from a particular cultural or social order to claim self regardless of place, expectations, circumstances, or politics. Again, this flight may be performed in physical acts but is ultimately and more fundamentally a claiming of space within space from which one has been or "should be" excluded. Flight then is a two-pronged activity as it involves simultaneous retreat and seizure of the prohibited space. Indeed, cosmopolitanism as it is experienced in *Banjo* shows what Ross Posnock suggests, that cosmopolites "refuse to know their place" (803). Posnock believes that cosmopolitanism is "less an identity than a practice; cosmopolitanism is a way to elude disciplinary social demands for legibility and to appropriate culture goods" (803). The fact that McKay's *Banjo* deals with and is centered around the working class and poor of Marseille's migrant population is significant in this light because it challenges the traditionally held belief that cosmopolitanism "arose as the behavior of an emergent bourgeois class" (Posnock 803).

Posnock participates in this error as he situates black cosmopolitanism in the context of bourgeois egalitarian traditions, by identifying W. E. B. Dubois as its father. By locating black cosmopolitanism within the boundaries of the United States and African American culture, Posnock does not give himself room to examine and interpret the complexities of black male subjectivities outside of domesticity, bourgeois politics and mimicry. What Posnock misses is the mongrel platform that holds up black identity in the modern world. By mongrel I mean the viscous nature of black culture and

societies in the shaping of black people's lives and sensibilities. Yet he cites historian Peter Brown's argument that

even as early as the second-century Roman Empire, cosmopolitanism flourished not among the aristocracy and governing classes, "who prided themselves on preserving the ancient particularities of their hometowns," but among the striving lower classes seeking "wider horizons," "humbler men" who welcomed "the erosion of local differences through trade and emigration, and the weakening of ancient barriers (Posnock 803).

The ways in which McKay's men and Banjo in particular challenge and unsettle the status quo with their "vulgar" styles of life identify the spirit of marronage that in my view is ultimately at the base of black cosmopolitanism. Their flight is the act of marronage and it marks the "flight from stereotype, the identity prison house" (Posnock, 804). Like the maroon, the cosmopolitan demands a place in the new world and attempts to assert his self-expressions as part of the experience of culture and modernity. In fact, "rather than [being] preoccupied with opposition and exclusion, cosmopolitanism regards culture as public property and nurtures the capacity for appropriation as a tool for the excluded to attain access to a social order of democratic equality" (Posnock 804). Like the maroons who escaped from slavery, McKay's vagabond cosmopolites represent a flight from stock cultural representations and the expectations that come with being solely "raced" and "cultural" commodities.

The idea of the cosmopolite's view of culture as public, freely accessible property distinguishes cosmopolitanism from other terms often used interchangeably such as "transnationality," and I have used "cosmopolitanism" for an important reason.

Transnationality, like internationalism, assumes the acquisition of subjectivity within the epistemological paradigm set by the plantation, in this case the nation state. I argue that in his presentation of his chief characters, Banjo and Ray, McKay showcases maroon figures whose self-determined masculine selfhood is driven by their deliberate assumption of an a-national identity. Cosmopolitanism places the world, the cosmos at the feet of the maroon as the space of his spectacular tightrope negotiations. The way these two protagonists play out their assumption of power and selfhood speaks to the complexity and variety of models for masculine subjectivity that McKay is working to reveal as clearly available for the black male of the 1920s, even as he was hedged in by proscriptions both black and white.

In the context of the attempt to represent maroon excursion in a more expanded form as international travel, McKay subtitles *Banjo* “A Story without a Plot,” to draw attention to its construction as loosely co-existing scenes, or extended vignettes suggesting the maroon refusal and even inability to “settle,” given his besieged condition. The almost digressionary effect of such a structure recalls the oral story telling traditions of McKay’s Caribbean roots, and resonates with Glissant’s characterization of “the novel of the Americas” (*Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays* 144) as one that “shatter[s] the stone of time” (144) – that is to say, refuses linear promulgations; dispenses with reified concepts of genre; and “takes shape at the edge of writing and speech”(147). McKay’s insertion of his oral, improvisational poetics into the genre of the 1920s novel is a maroon encroachment, the subversive use of the hidden “plot”(lessness) to undermine the poetics of the plantation” (Glissant 144).

Banjo, the novel, with its disconnected and individual stories mimics the excursionary orality that shaped, and ultimately connected peoples of African descent, regardless of geographical or geopolitical location. *Banjo*, as a story without a plot, gives space to traveling subjects to play or replay incidents or describe scenes that reflect the reality of their lives, not with embarrassment or self-deprecation, but with the vigor and volume of a vagabond, cosmopolitan class. Here I underscore that McKay's motley crew of (maroon) vagabonds are picked from the very action and life of the Ditch in Marseilles and they do not represent a romantic or an exotic depiction of black life. They problematize nation, home, and masculinity with their daring raids on Western Hegemonies.

The "plot-less" structure of the novel is itself a structure: the characters who share the stage in this unconventional story are part of a jazz-like composition, varied in their cultural backgrounds, political and social views, as well as their sexual attitudes and practices. McKay's book flows with the improvisationality and temporality of a jazz ensemble to express his radical celebration of black life. The fact that the novel is without a plot also draws attention to and denounces the value Western civilization and its concepts of modernity place on literary conventions and the kinds of literacy associated with these conventions. The practices of these characters who live like vagabonds, who meet in bars and cafes to discuss the politics of the Black diaspora and who use music, dance and speech as a media to celebrate black vernacular traditions and selfhood. The men in *Banjo* are neither archetypes of Western literature nor heroes of black nationalism or political debates, yet they are "real" to the culture and experience of France's cosmopolis.

Banjo is as much about Marseilles as it is about Paris, as much about the USA as it is about Europe, about modernity as much as it is about postmodernity, about capitalism as it is about communism, about cosmopolitanism as much as xenophobia; about instinct as much as it is about intellect. So it is important how we read the novel because, as Brent Hayes Edwards so appropriately asserts, it is an “elusive” text in both style and context. Edwards confirms this idea in his fascinating treatment of McKay and *Banjo* in his book *The Practice of Diaspora*. He suggests that *Banjo* is an elusive project because it is “an autonomous system, a “composite voice,” at the fringes of modernity; irrepressible, goading, infuriating the civilization that would crush it – and yet elusive, somehow of a different order, of a different logic, one that civilization wants desperately to reject and obliterate as a social possibility” (225).

In theorizing McKay’s treatment of his maroon men, I want to draw also on Edwards’ characterization of McKay’s men as “waste”²⁶ using a similar meaning to Mikhail Bakhtin’s “grotesque” in *Rabelais and His World*. From my account, this is the cosmopolitan maroon at large in the modern world. If, as Edwards contends, *Banjo* can be seen as a “journal geared toward rethinking the term “primitive” at the very moment when European exoticism reigned supreme” (224), then it is my argument that these characters who live on the margins of Western civilization are symbols of the resistance in marronage. Indeed, this space of “waste” or “the grotesque” is the space where creolization and marronage meet. This meeting or merging is a moment, an event even where black culture on an a-national basis is being placed as a resistive (maroon) force

²⁶ See Edwards invocation of French philosopher Georges Bataille’s idea of heterology (224). Edwards draws on the term to describe the elusivity of McKay’s novel and also to characterize Ray’s fascination with the “refuse” that the Ditch is. I would further argue that Ray’s fascination with “waste” is really McKay’s intrigue with the vagabond class of black diasporans living in Marseilles.

that is able to “bring intellect to the aid of instinct” (164) because what exists here as a result of these two cultural forces, marronage and creolization, is a place that emits, that possesses a “magical intelligence” (260) that “stirred the poetic mind” and which could “diminish stupidity,” which was to Ray the “intolerable thing about human existence” (260). This is McKay’s ongoing project and he like Ray felt civilization a stupid thing because “its general attitude toward the colored man was to rob him of his instincts and make him inhuman. Under it the thinking colored man could not function normally like his white brother, responsive and reacting spontaneously to the emotions of pleasure or pain, joy or sorrow, kindness or hardness, charity or anger, and forgiveness” (164). Ray struggles to be present to the “waste” as a necessary part of his sanity in the West and use his “instincts” – waste as muse for his intellectual self and creativity. By being present to the “waste” around him, Ray can see and resist, what he calls, the “stupidity” that comes from that lack of awareness of selfhood. What Ray finds abominable and frightening is how western conceptions of black or non black cultures and identities as “waste” can impose the crippling idea of shame on these groups.

Jews ashamed of being Jews. Changing their names and their religion...for the Jesus of the Christians. The Irish objecting to the artistic use of their own rich idioms. Inferiority bile in non-Nordic minorities. Educated Negroes ashamed of their race’s intuitive love of color, wrapping themselves up in respectable gray, ashamed of the Congo-sounding laughter, ashamed of their complexion, (bleaching out), ashamed of their strong appetites. No being Ashamed of Ray (164-5).

Indeed, as Edwards adds, McKay considers “black expression less as atavistic or savage, and more as the “excretion” or waste produced by the Western “civilizing machine during the process of assimilation to the standard of capitalist accumulation” (Edwards 224). Thus, McKay, and by extension his characters, refuse subordination or “denigration” because they claim not just the world marked by this “excretion” but they also claim within it the terms of their subjectivity. By doing so they commit the actions of maroons, “the clearest proof of [their] resistance and resiliency” (Edwards 224). McKay’s characters offer a cosmopolitan vision of black culture, especially where Western capitalist civilization and Western traditions of modernity seek to discard and disremember it as “waste.” McKay insists through his portrayal of Ray and Banjo and the slew of characters in the text that black culture, produced out of maroon existence, does not meet the expectations of nation, class, race, or tradition; it is ambiguous, volatile, and grand. It is confounding in the ways it eludes the logic that drives the teleological construction of identities.

Yet if *Home to Harlem* is a continuing, unfinished project of imaginative self-reinvention, *Banjo* further highlights the precariousness of a maroon life, in which one is constantly looking over one’s shoulder for the surveillance of the enemy who may also be a collaborator, as the British were to the maroons with whom they signed treaty. For, as Michel Fabre argues in his postscript to the French translation of *Banjo*, McKay is not

an iconoclast, even if he wants to depict “western” civilization as he understands it. He doesn’t try to shock. On the contrary, he softens any element which would appear indecent and always keeps in mind his readers’ prejudices, their taboos, their reactions, their ideological perspectives. In fear

of shocking his American readership, as he writes to Bradley, he refuses to extend, as his agents suggests it then, the "amorous triangle" to Black characters as well as whites. He does not go into details when talking about the relationship between Banjo and Chère Blanche; the sexual encounters between the bums and the prostitutes in the Ditch remain implicit, because the American reader doesn't want to see the raw reality of relationships between races. The choice of Latnah, born in Aden from an Arab mother and an unknown father and who combines Arab, Oriental and Indian features, as his feminine protagonist, is significant. Being only half white, she can be used as a foil without enhancing prejudice" (322-323).

It seems the economics of audience and readership force McKay, the maroon, into yet another negotiation that relativizes his reach after the iconoclastic novel.

We may also take note of the inequalities of the reception of *Banjo*, the ways in which geopolitics constrained its ability to perform maroon/guerilla subversions of culture and psychology. McKay's biographer, Wayne Cooper, notes that the novel became a foundation upon which the growing group of young black literary radicals, comprised mainly French Caribbean students in Paris (Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire and Léon Damas) launched their literary careers as Négritude artists. In addition, Cooper himself draws an even wider web to include Senegalese novelist and playwright Ousmane Sembène whose first novel *Le Docker noir* (1956) Lillian Kesteloot believes was influenced more by McKay's *Banjo* than the novels of Richard Wright to which *Le Docker Noir* is usually compared. Cooper notes that Sembène highlights and celebrates the place and value of McKay's text in the literary and intellectual work of young black

intellectuals and artists in France; “*Banjo* was displayed in black student bookshelves right next to a book by French anthropologist Delafosse,” (Cooper 259) who was also writing sympathetically about African culture. Furthermore, Cooper adds that McKay’s and *Banjo*’s influence is remembered by Joseph Zobel in his novel *La Rue Cases Nègres* (1950), as it “aroused much discussion in Martinique” (259). Cooper also notes that critic Lillian Kesteloot remembers that “in interviewing Senghor, Damas, and Césaire in the early 1960’s, she found they could still cite entire chapters of *Banjo*. ‘What struck me in this book,’ Césaire recalled, ‘is that for the first time Negroes were described truthfully, without inhibition or prejudice’” (259).

We recall that Senghor claimed McKay as the spiritual father of Négritude, and located him at the center of the Pan-Africanist literary and cultural movement. The French Caribbean poets took McKay seriously because they had experienced the uniquely invasive forms of cultural erasure and deracination through civilizational narratives that the French practised on their colonies, who found McKay relevant or took him and his work seriously. In fact, McKay was quite prophetic in his remark that it would take the American thirty to forty years before *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo* would be appreciated or understood. *Banjo*, however, holds an important place in French culture, by the most ironic serendipities of maroon infiltration. During World War II, Adolph Hitler razed the Vieux Port – an ironic event that seeks to obliterate Marseilles’ role as a maroon community – where most of McKay’s novel is set. And for those French citizens who remember this area before it was razed, McKay’s novel is an important document that historicizes most accurately Marseilles’ old geography; the streets,

architecture, cafés, brothels, restaurants, bars, ethnic neighborhoods, social conditions, nightlife and culture.

When the novel opens, we are introduced to McKay's protagonist Banjo, Lincoln Agrippa Daily, who hails from the United States. Banjo arrives in the Ditch in Marseilles and meets the friendly vagabonds, Malty and Ginger, both West Indians, Dengel from Senegal, and Bugsy. Banjo is introduced with great flourish: we are told that he is a "great vagabond of the lowly life" (11). As a "child of the Cotton Belt, he had wandered all over America; his life was a dream of vagabondage" one that he was "perpetually pursuing and realizing in odd ways, always incomplete but never unsatisfactory" (11). More than Jake in, *Home to Harlem*, Banjo is a moving maroon, a wanderer. He has a desire to escape, to withdraw, be on the move, be in a state of flight, to constantly rehearse the acts that characterize the process of marronage and signify his status as a cosmopolite. He finds the maroon's ambiguous security, not just in the objects or people around him or the physical space he inhabits, but also in the interrogative spirit that enables his freedom to take flight at a moment's notice. The narrator tells us "Banjo had an unquenchable desire to be always going" (11).

Banjo shows this maroon consciousness in the tightrope acts he performs as a black man without work or citizenship in the white metropolis. For example, Banjo plays his banjo at a small bistro accompanied by a girl who plays a piano but finds that his music is not successful because it is not loud enough for the "close, noisy, little market." He then thinks "it would need an orchestra to fix them right" (14). One can see Banjo's psychology of infiltration and adaptation in his determination to propose efficient and secure ways of not only challenging the social order but also inserting himself as a

legitimate player. He recognizes that the “American darky” is a commodity, “a performing fool of the world today” who is demanded everywhere” (14). Thus, he seizes upon the commodification of his “blackness” to make his dream of an “orchestra” a reality. He runs the risk of being described as a “nigger” but Banjo is not afraid to take this risk because as he puts it, “That’s the stuff for a live nigger like me to put ovah and no cheap playing from café to café and handing out mah hat for a lousy sou.” By calling himself nigger in this moment, he does the very same thing that Ellison’s *Invisible Man* does to the Brotherhood. This kind of cunning is the guerilla technology that maroons employ to negotiate place and space and create their survival strategies. What this moment also shows is the ambiguity in the maroon self, withdrawn from the “plantation life” – the white metropolis – but still in it, and manipulating its paradigms and products for the maroon’s own ends.

It is important to recognize the economic valences of this decision: Banjo understands and inserts himself into the dynamics of Marseilles as an economic center. He aims to brandish his independence at all costs and show his autonomy and self-respect. He does not mind taking advantage of the idea that the “American darky is a performing fool in the world today” because he aims to deconstruct the power relations that give rise to this idea. In fact, he does not see himself as a minstrel because he has a plan “if he can git some a these heah panhandling fellahs together” to show “them some real nigger music” (14). Banjo’s balancing act between economic persona and inviolate subjectivity is seen in the limits he declares to collusion:

I’ll nevah gwine to lay myself wide open to any insulting cracker of a white man. For I’ll let a white man mobilize mah black moon for a whupping, ef he

can, foh calling me a nigger... I ain't a bigheaded nigger but a white man has to respect me for when I address myself to him the vibration of brain magic that I turn loose on him is like electric shock on the spring of his cranium (42).

The declaration that he will have an electrifying effect on the "cranium" of the white man speaks to the agency of his male subjectivity, which, even though he emerges from below, carries the tempo of authority and bravado in the accents of the Midnight Robber of the Trinidad Carnival.²⁷ Banjo's hilarious pronouncement here recalls Jake's boast upon Harlem, "Harlem, I got you number down!" Indeed, what Banjo demonstrates in this moment is a lack of fear or shame in his black masculine subjectivity, *which is developed around the idea that he is a nigger*. He is "nigger" on his own terms, not those of a white man or Western civilization or the capitalist enterprise that exploits his labor. Thus, he will not accept "a white man calling him a nigger" because the white man's version of who he is, comes from the tragedy of his own life and inability to see himself in Banjo. McKay renders Banjo's relation to the word "nigger" in very Caribbean terms, for in Jamaica "nigger" is a respectable word in the creole vernacular, and acquires a negative connotation only in the context of who is using it and why. This linguistic crossover is one of the ways McKay imports creolization across spaces of "ethnicity," which are then dissolved.

Banjo's maroon subjectivity is built upon his ability to identify himself as anything, anyone, anywhere, whenever he chooses to. It is clearly visible in his ability to navigate the fluidities of a market space that depends on adaptability and adept

²⁷ An example of the Midnight Robber's bravado could be :One midnight in eternity a mighty ancient wind blow from the Kalahari to the Gobi and sweep through the Sahara and there I form and rise out of the belly of the pit of hell. "I is the Scorpion King! *Ah does bade in acid and scrub meh teeth in the ashes of Caroni and grease meh foot beyond petroleum jelly.*" (<http://thebookmann.blogspot.com/2007/06/midnight-robber-speaks.html>)

“footworks” according to the currents of the time. Several aspects of this maroon polymorphism are symbolized in Banjo’s presentation as a jazzman. What he purports to play on his banjo is jazz, already a music of improvisation, but what Banjo plays is not so much a recognizable jazz but something recognizable as having the improvisatory capacity that is jazz: he mixes in the blues, the “jelly roll” and lyrics such as “Stay, Carolina stay” to which he assigns an impossible West African genealogy. Equally the story of his origins that he feeds to immigration officers and his bosses to whom he had declared that he was not an American, performs a jazz narrative of improvisations:

They had all been thunderstruck when he calmly announced that he was not American. Everything about him – accent, attitude, and movement – shouted Dixie. But Banjo insisted that his parentage was really foreign. He had served in the Canadian army...His declaration had to be accepted by his bosses (12).

This is the manifestation of Banjo’s traveled subjectivity and narrative authority of the self. He demonstrates a particular kind of actualization that confounds and dazzles his audience (we are told the officers are confident Banjo will make his way anywhere) because he has taken in hand his own ontology and made his citizenship an ambiguous if not alienated one. The fact that he places himself as “foreign” shocks his audience because ultimately Banjo becomes a “freak,” an unknown, a strange presence who lacks “identity” status. This is a moment of crisis, not only for the racial or imperial imperatives of nation but also for the jurisdiction that polices these imperatives. In fact, Banjo’s act constitutes a questioning of American democracy, ultimately achieving a tectonic shift in the political, social, and historical construction of his subjectivity as a man. According to Michelle Ann Stephens, he exemplifies “traces of alternative

identification that developed among hybrid, multinational populations raveling in the spaces between the New and Old Worlds, throughout the centuries of colonial and imperial development” (59).

Banjo’s “foreign” status becomes the vehicle through which he inaugurates his self-representation to transcend race, class, nationality and geography. In Banjo’s profile, transnationalism as a concept does not exist, since his is a narrative of a-nationality. By identifying himself as foreign, he implicates himself into a Post World I discourse of free-spirited independence and bravado. His actions during this inter-war period command a complex account of what I describe as maroon agency that gives him the opportunity to cross boundaries and once again take flight. The kinds of social dangers that persisted after World War I, an increase in lynchings and the rise of Klu Klux Klan activity in the United States, coupled with massive unemployment and harassment of black men by white police officers, makes Banjo’s maroon act even more significant. One can describe it as an act of self-preservation where his declaration is indeed a flight from this kind of social climate. His renunciation of his “national identity” could very well be part of the personal disgust, disappointment and shame he feels towards the continued racism and marginalization of black men in the United States.

Banjo’s renunciation does model the kinds of flight that were being enacted during the 1920’s by American literary figures who were disillusioned with and frightened by the nature of American society. The fact that Banjo’s act impresses the American immigration officers is duly ironic because it is a classic act of renouncing the power of American nationalism and hegemony. In fact, Banjo is being the consummate trickster, trying to undermine and diminish the racist power structures evident through the

US immigration personnel. Additionally, Banjo's renunciation does include knowledge of the black soldier's status in France after WWI. Both the French army and government decorated Black soldiers for their valor and bravery in combat and large numbers of these soldiers remained in France rather than return "home" to the US.

The flip side of this renunciation, beyond foreignness, is the declaration of cosmopolitan citizenship and subjectivity that elude the jurisdiction of the border posts erected by imperial, colonial and racist powers. Banjo and the narrative voice invariably render his maroon incursions of bravado in terms of spectacular hilarity: soon after he returns from World War I and crosses over to America to work, he "hit upon the plan of getting himself deported" (11); and in his encounter with the immigration officials, they tease him about his "foreign" subjectivity, "asking him what he would do in Europe when he spoke no other language than straight Yankee. However, their manner betrayed their feeling of confidence that Banjo would make his way anywhere" (12). Banjo's captive and captivated audiences, both within the narrative and as readers of the book, laugh at his pronouncements; but the internal audience at least fails to see the political motive at work in his declaration of freedom. They are unable to interpret the logic of Banjo's action or even see this as his use of "guerrilla tactics," the maroon's occluded, trickster flight (performed in full view of the dazzled, befuddled crowd) and emerging out of an alter/native (Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens*) cultural space and a psychological realm. For Banjo's actions exemplify an "inner resistance" that results in an affirmation of the self.

Banjo's ability to "put himself over" (43) as foreigner enacts an interesting play between identities. Because he has the charm and personality that may be the property of

any human being, he is able to “put over” foreignness as his primary public identification, and in that way escape the fixities of identification by race which is the primary signifier in the USA and which is hierarchically marked upon his body. In other words, Banjo’s charm and deployment of foreignness function as maroon ambiguity and technology, allowing him to escape a racialized construction that could color his dealings. This is not to say, however, that he does not practice blackness to his benefit, as we see in the section of the novel where he talks about the international commercial and cultural currency of the black man, his music, and creativity.

A spin off product of Banjo’s maroon technologies of charm, performance and narrative as re-invention, or “re-engineering” (Brodber, 1997) of self is the way he does indeed unleash the vibration of brain magic on the spring of the white men’s craniums:

The immigration officials liked his presence, his voice, his language of rich Aframericanisms. They admired, too, the way he had chosen to go off wandering again. It was nothing less than a deliberate joke to them, for Banjo could never convince any American, especially a Southern-knowing one, that he was not Aframerican. *It was singular enough to stir their imagination* (12, emphasis mine).

Banjo’s encroachment on white psychological space takes place at an ironic nexus--in the border space between his self-referential spectacularity and their reading of him as mere spectacle, or entertainment. The fact that they are charmed by the performance that is so seamless its character as political tightrope negotiation is not perceived, does not preclude but rather ironizes the power he exercises over these guardians of the (plantation) gate. Banjo has indeed performed on the white men’s craniums what in

Jamaican epistemology is referred to as “high science,” interventions that have the power of science but elude explanation in scientific terms. High science is a creole and maroon technology that hovers between the occult and the logically accessible; in Jake’s case, between mind control and magic, a duality referenced in his term “brain magic.”

Stephens finds Banjo’s actions empowering because according to her, he “uses the laws of the state to facilitate his own free movement” and invent a new “form of resistance within the context of a new, nationally organized maritime world” (*Black Empire* 182). In that respect, I would add, Banjo’s maroon performance is an act of modernity, one that redefines modernity since modernity was supposedly not within the purview of a black man. Further, as Stephens argues,

Banjo imagines and enacts new possibilities for black masculine identity formation, and it is his courage and ingenuity that are appreciated by the immigration officials. In freely choosing vagabondage as [subjectivity], Banjo attempts to obtain the utopian transnational ideal, his own passport to glory of free nationality (182).

Banjo thus proposes a subjectivity of freedom in a space where freedom is not readily available or visible. He demonstrates the attitude of the maroon as self-regulating subject whose act of denunciation is an attempt to reverse the logic of exclusion of the subject. What he achieves in this movement away from this “regulated space” is to ultimately mistreat his nationality as a given, material, normative, fixed condition and therefore puts the meaning and stability of American nationality, to use Judith Butler’s terms, into “productive crisis” (Butler 10).

Earlier, I discussed the way Banjo navigates between an economic persona and an inviolable self that decides the terms on which he inhabits the castle of his black skin. Equally, Banjo navigates between economic entrepreneurship and epiphanic dream, producing a maroon version that abrogates the hegemony of “the American Dream;” in the process he reveals the complex layers of a many faceted personality. The distinction between him and Jake in *Home to Harlem* is important to note in this regard, for Banjo’s maroon personality in the expansive space of Marseilles seems totally, even idealistically, free from the racial and ideological constraints such as the sex and gender value systems that prevail in Harlem and circumscribe even the most expansive of Jake’s self-elaborations. Banjo’s persona as “economic man” is another important distinguishing feature of his push to personal hegemony.

However, Banjo’s dream is not just to make money but to marry the economic, the cultural-political and the artistic: he is a dreamer who wants to start an orchestra; first, in order to show patrons of the Ditch real black music, not minstrel music, and second, to take advantage of the commercial and cultural appeal of jazz music based on its popularity in Paris. Moreover, Banjo sees this as an opportunity to sell his music and not himself to the whites who discriminate against and exploit him. Brent Hayes Edwards sums up Banjo’s dream in this manner:

The dream expressed in the word “orchestra” is of course bigger than simply playing music: more than anything, Banjo wants to find in the music a model of the social, a way to institutionalize the black boys’ easy good-time interaction. This word, and the sporadic, ephemeral attempts to achieve it, are the closest the book comes to espousing any form of black internationalism,

any means for a relatively permanent structure that would articulate a black transnational community into a singular albeit shifting expression of the “African rhythm of life... In a broader sense, an orchestra expresses a dream to formalize in musical performance the “spirit of solidarity” (158) among the black drifters, their ways of supporting each other with food, drink, shelter, and commiseration. Music seems for Banjo equally to provide an aesthetic model for the “vagabond existence” (219 -220).

Edwards’ assessment of Banjo as eschewing internationalism and transnationalism is of course spot on; Banjo’s economic/artistic practice is more in keeping with Gilroy’s vision of how the black music industry has created a Black Atlanticist flow across borders, or Kamau Brathwaite’s perception of the tidalectics of maroon and creole culture and praxis, which I discuss later in the chapter.

Banjo’s dream is linked moreover to his desire to expand the scope and wealth of a class of blacks who are not walking pathology. The word “orchestra” has echoes of Banjo’s own meditation on his agency. Banjo is aware that the music he wishes to compose and play has global currency and can be used to negotiate the terms on which he exists as a “foreigner” in Marseilles’ polyglot space. He knows that the music’s “tidalectics” is another useful technology that offers him a productive and spectacular way of inhabiting and exploiting the cosmopolitan locale in which he is living. This is so much so that he wants to devise his own economic circumstance to have access to a popular and accessible cultural language that is a part of the “big wide open hole” that Marseilles is to him. The music, therefore, becomes a terrain, a cultural and social one where Banjo configures himself as a cultural teacher because he wants to highlight

through the form and media of music something that many white and black patrons miss in their appreciation of jazz and blues, which is the level of sophistication in the making, production and marketing of the music.

Banjo's sophistication and creativity as a musician are compounded by his travels around the world where he has had the opportunity to see some of the capital that is accumulated from black labor, talent and culture. He says "I could sure make one them dumps look like a real spohting place, with a few of us niggers piffforming in theah," (20) but he soon realizes what it would take to do that. There is a kind of moral dilemma that is involved in pursuing his dream and he would rather forgo this dream than to be one of the "hogs without any imagination, just fighting for the sous (20)." It is very clear that Banjo's dream is not sustained in the frivolity of life in the city, but by his particular exigent integrity, which drives his sense of his manself. Thus, when Bugsy asks Banjo, "now supposing you was given a present of it, what would you make outa one a them joints in Boody Lane?" (20) he responds, "For I wasn't inclosing them in mah catalogory, becausen they ain't real places, brother; them's just stick-in-the-mud holes. Anyway, if one was gived to me I'd try everything doing excep'n lighting it afire" (21).

Not only his charm, economic fearlessness and spectacular risk-taking but also this sense of integrity that dares to step outside of even the accepted culture of masculinity in black Marseilles causes Banjo to emerge as the natural leader among the motley crew of so-called bums, Bugsy, Ginger, Maltby and later Taloufa. The very instant he enters the novel, he clarifies what kind man he is and soon challenges the other men to imagine themselves to be men, not beggars or bums. In the chapter entitled "The Breakwater," Banjo outlines his plan as an ambitious musician and entrepreneur. It is

clear that the other men are not used to this kind of bold self-imagining and are clearly more at ease with life as it unfolds in the Ditch. Bugsy at first dismisses Banjo's plan of starting an orchestra saying, "it is tall easier talking than doing. They'se some things jest right as they is and ain't nevah was made foh making better or worsen." Banjo introduces them to a larger imagining of themselves as economic agents when he refuses panhandling as an activity that frames them in the white officers' eyes as "niggers." He "could not make a happy business of it like them. Because sometimes they were savagely turned down and insulted and he was not the type to stand that" (40).

In one scene of the chapter "The Feeding," a fight breaks out soon after the men begin to "feed." The context is the provision of food by the white officers. Banjo declines to participate in the "feed" and proceeds up the gangway of the ship. Bugsy asks him if he "ain't going to put away some a heah stuff under you' shirt?" (41). Banjo's response again exhibits his sense of his black manhood that is premised on respect, independence and political will. He retorts: "The mess you jest fight and trample ovah? You c'n stuff you' guts tell youse all winded, but my belly kain't accommodate none a that theah stuff, for that is too hard feeding for mine" (41-42). Banjo's dismissal of Bugsy's invitation is not because he refuses to beg for food, demeaning as that might be. Rather, he refuses to carry on in the same roles of spectacle and savage scripted by the white officers who regard them as "a damned lot of disgusting niggers" (42). The very title "feeding" becomes offensive as a term that reduces them to the passive, dependent role of livestock or infants, but further invents them as receptacles of the Other's narrative of performance.

Banjo's retort to Bugsy instructs his buddies too to reject these roles. Indeed, what Banjo begins to initiate them into is a Garveyesque Pan African brotherhood, based on

common respect for self and a desire to challenge the places of inferiority that were easily assigned and accepted by poor blacks. This is exactly what Ginger applauds at the end of Banjo's rebuttal. "Attaboy! You done deliver a declaration of principle, but a declaration of principle is usynimous with the decision of the destiny of the individual in the general" (43). The language of applause in "Attaboy!" points not only to Bugsy's acceptance of this leadership but also his sense of a performance (of masculine selfhood) that is of a different kind from what is normative in the Ditch.

Banjo's role here rehearses Ray's in *Home to Harlem* but with a crucial difference: Banjo is of, not simply among, the motley crew. He does not hold himself aloof from them (although in Ray's case the holding aloof had been on both sides) and in fact articulates a way of being a "bum" without losing self-respect, agency or political will. Banjo as "bum with dignity" asserts the legitimacy of the frequencies from below by elucidating the grounds of their integrity. The acceptance and revision of bum, like his ironizing acceptance of "nigger [on his own terms]" is a maroon and creolizing balancing act between ideologies, and it runs the risk, as do all such tightrope walks on the cusp of stereotypes, of coloring him with the enduring fixities of the stereotype, yet Banjo is able to elude all such designations by the dignity with which he carries himself and the *practical and visible alternatives* that he rehearses and inhabits.

A crucial aspect of Banjo's maroon field of play is the space of the Ditch itself, which McKay's motley crew inhabits. When Hitler saw Marseilles in World War II, he described it as a wasteland, a space of contamination where all the detritus of humanity dwelt. Hitler was commenting principally on the port section of the city, the open doorway to the global human, cultural and economic traffic and the vast networks of

relation that gave the city its cosmopolitan character. Hitler's comment sets up Marseilles within a dialectics not unlike that which the New World plantation signified and initiated: the plantation as the visible locus of empire and imperial desire on the one hand, and as the hub and catalyst of the currents of post/modernity, globality and creolization on the other. The dialectic is the site of struggle between these two paradigmatic frames out of which emerges marronage as resistance and tightrope walking between imperatives.

But the character of Marseilles as a port city and the hub of vast inflows, outflows and confluences of peoples, cultures and trades (and more particularly the disruptive meeting of lowlifes, blacks, sailors, vagabonds, prostitutes and thieves upon the space of the civilized) problematizes, at particular instances even overwrites, the three way mode of the dialectic, replacing it with multiple other paradigms that move it from plantation to cosmopolis, and indeed supplant the terrestrial metaphor in favor of metaphors of the sea. Metaphors of the sea are among the major tropological lenses employed in Caribbean discourse to address the complex issues of creolization and the multiplicity, fluidity, contradiction, tension and polymorphism of being and act that it produces.

Kamau Brathwaite replaces the concept of dialectic with "tidalectics" as a way of refusing the gridlock of plantation epistemologies. For Brathwaite, the dialectic with its linear trajectory cannot account for what I term the crabwise movement of maroon resistance or what Glissant terms the "transversality" of creole being and subjectivity (*Caribbean Discourse* 67). Dialectics in Brathwaite's view is a function of "missile cultures," "another gun."²⁸ Tidalectics on the other hand belongs to the culture of the circle where "success moves outward from centre to circumference and back again in a

²⁸ See Brathwaite's 1977 essay "Caliban, Ariel and Unprospero in the Conflict of Creolization: A Study of Slave Revolts in Jamaica in 1831-32"

tidal dialectic. An itál dialectic: a continuum across a peristyle” (*Caribbean Culture* 42). Tidalectics ultimately draws upon “the movement of the water backwards and forwards, rather than linear [progressions]” (*Caribbean Culture* 164). What Brathwaite is attempting here is a way to signify the complex epistemological standpoint and ways of being of Caribbean peoples that escape discernment or definition by the singularizing mythologies of tyrants and the West.

Marseilles in McKay’s representation is a space within Europe that defies European definitions; this is the result of its fluid, shifting creolizations and the meetings of Peoples of the Sea²⁹ within what I might term its fluvial terrain. Marseilles then is an ideal space for the elaboration of new and enabling subjectivities even as it is also a space that highlights most starkly how such subjectivities become spectacular flights and adaptations in response to oppression. For the dialectic too is subsumed within the multiplicity of the tidalectic; in this sense the cosmopolitan space does not erase the need for marronage but allows it a larger, more fluid/fluvial (and therefore that much more dangerous) space of operation.

Marseilles then functions as a gateway of competing possibilities and it is a testament to Banjo’s maroon abilities that he was able to navigate the various spaces of this fluvial terrain in whatever guise he chose. Marseilles was “the port seamen talked about – the marvelous, dangerous, attractive, big, wide-open port” (12). His skills are displayed most tellingly at the port, where he functions as a link man and negotiator based on the networks of acquaintanceship he had cultivated over years of travel as a seaman in various parts of the world from Canada to Barcelona. Banjo has countless

²⁹ Benítez- Rojo uses the term “Peoples of the Sea” to refer to cultures that like the Caribbean exhibit “polyrhythms” “supersyncretisms” and other fluid complexities of being and performance.

contacts as a result of these travels and so we find him at the hub and center of Marseilles as an agent of diaspora and cosmopolitan becoming for the entire city. Moving in and out of these spaces requires cultural, political and psychological sinuosity, a balancing act that is both unobtrusive and spectacular.

Banjo's maroon leadership and subjectivity are seen in other spectacular ways. It is Banjo's music and the steps he takes to realize his dream of an orchestra that releases in the men their deep and ontological connections to body and culture, that have been submerged in the daily grind of living in "the poverty of the grim adventure of 'big city livin'" (Jones 105). Submersion here is a form of marronage, in Brathwaite's sense of the term – parts of the self gone underground. Within the Ditch the dialectic of marronage and plantation power is always apparent. Plantation power is highly visible in realities such as having to beg for food and the symbolism of the ditch as a place for detritus or waste, even as the maroon resistance offered is signaled in the symbolism of the ditch as the topography of hiding, or covert attack. But beyond this dialectic the tidalectics of jazz as a sinuous music of resistance, a performance of virtuosity and an infinite flow of creolized currents of possibility operate in the Ditch, with Banjo again at the center.

Banjo's improvised and improvisational orchestra, a cargo boat crew of "four music-making colored boys, with banjo, ukelele, mandolin, guitar, and horn" that he and Malty, "mad with excitement," hijack to the Senegalese bar one afternoon, leads the migrants into an experience that evidences how the spirit and cultures inside them make meaningless of the established social and cultural boundaries that police or restrict the black body. In this manner and act one sees the possibility of McKay's cosmopolitan experience and the possibility of that experience influencing the resistance to any

exclusionary act based on ideas about primitivism or barbarism. For Banjo's orchestra as a bold metropolitan and transnational masculine enterprise eludes the form and aesthetics of Western standards of civilization. The music confounds "modernity" and "civilization" and leaves an astounding and spectacular reality that must be seen, wondered at and acknowledged. McKay presents this moment with restrained excitement:

The Senegalese boys crowd the floor, dancing with one another. They dance better male with male or individually, than with girls, putting more power in their feet, dancing more wildly, more natively, more savagely. Senegalese in blue overalls, Madagascans in khaki, dancing together (48-49).

The dancing, male with male rather than with women seems like a radical shift from the hetero-normative performances of black masculinity, but rather what McKay is showing is that within African diasporic tradition and culture, gender-specific performances represent one form of male bonding and expression that offers a window into a radical way of black male self-fashioning. The moment where these Senegalese men dance together is not without historical memory. One might immediately be drawn to the sensuality in McKay's description as representative of a homoerotic or merely homosocial moment in the novel. But the dance is not simply a reflection of a male centered community. It stands as a radical act of embracing what many Europeans and Western viewers might call African primitivism. In that "context", McKay uses the dance to represent acts of *Négritude* that are practiced in self-knowledge.

This was at the heart of *Négritude* founder and Senegalese President Senghor's action when he set up the National Ballet Company in Senegal to challenge racist objectification of the African body and the black subject. At the heart of Senghor's

creation of the dance theatre company was the celebration of the dance as concretized knowledge as opposed to the disembodied abstractions and the schizophrenic mind-body split that Western culture upheld as civilization. As Francesca Castaldi observes: “the dancing subject is the knowing subject par excellence in Senghor’s consciousness” (1). McKay was deliberately marking this utopian company of men as an example of the kinds of challenge the black cosmopolis could present to the West if this burgeoning population were not afraid to exercise its subjectivities “more wildly, more natively, more savagely” (48). McKay is suggesting that the emerging black cosmopolite must include in his expression of the self-cultivated in the diaspora, not only the fruits of travel or the questioned creolity of meeting with the West, but also the memory of Africa. The body as the plangent, living space of memory rehearses the meaning of the body to affirm what is “a primal authority of life larger than...language but of which ...language [is a mere extension]” (Forbes 210).

This representation of the dance recalls Caribbean writer-theorist Wilson Harris’ theorization of the limbo dance practiced in the Caribbean as a way of remembering but also transforming through the aesthetic pleasures of art, the tortured experience of being crammed in the unspeakable hold of the slave ship across the Middle Passage. The limbo is the ultimate spectacular balancing act, for as Harris explains, “the limbo dancer moves under a bar which is gradually lowered until a mere slit of space...remains through which with spread eagled limbs he passes like a spider” (*History, Fable and Myth* 157). Harris reads the limbo dance as a gateway between Africa and the Caribbean, and I am interpreting this as not only a memory of the loss of home but also a memory of home itself, for the body movement of the dance recaptures (albeit in creolized fashion) the

body movement of African dance forms. The limbo also stands as a form of flight back to Africa through the homage of the body.

Harris further theorizes the limbo as the trope of migration in the Americas, insofar as migration results in metamorphoses of being and subjectivity in the context of marronage:

those waves of migration which have hit the shores of the Americas...have, century after century, at various times possessed the stamp of the spider metamorphosis, in the refugee flying from Europe or in the indentured East Indian and Chinese from Asia...Limbo then reflects a certain kind of gateway to or threshold of a new world and the dislocation of a chain of miles (*History Fable and Myth* 157).

Though McKay's Senegalese men have not come to Marseilles through slavery but as free men, similar experiences of severance, re-membering and transformation are enacted in this dance as well. What is also enacted is the knowledge of their marronage, their isolation by objectifying discourses that denigrate their masculine and cultural self-expressions. The exultation of the dance makes it another moment of transformation as the men recover parts of themselves that like the limbo dancer's had been submerged: in Brathwaite's words that Harris quotes, "...the darkness... over me/and the water...hiding me/limbo/limbo like me ("Caliban" *Arrivants* 194).

Harris' characterization of the limbo dance as spider, or anancy aesthetic speaks to the trickster element in maroon activism and technology. The memory of Africa carried over in the body of the slave or migrant confounds and mystifies the dehumanizing efforts and epistemological categories of the plantation and the West. And

we see how McKay uses this scene at Café Africain in this light to amplify the novel's ironic cosmopolitan discourse. By focusing on two Africans, one from Cameroon and another from Dakar, who are dancing "a native sex-symbol dance" McKay mocks the image of black male sexuality as a performative element of the fantasy and fetishization of blackness by the West:

A coffee-black boy from Cameroon and a chocolate brown from Dakar stand up to each other to dance a native sex-symbol dance. Bending knee and nodding head, they dance up to each other. As they almost touch, the smaller boy spins suddenly round and dances away. Oh, exquisite movement! Like ram goat and a ram kid. Hands and feet! Shake that thing! (50)

The dance of these two men is a sensual portrayal of the atmosphere of Café Africain and the effects of Banjo's music. Their action is a multivalent account of black masculinity as maroon performance uncontained by the assumptions of normative heterosexuality. The dance performed by these two men signifies upon the ways in which, as maroon men they seize the space to enact other kinds of masculinity while challenging where and how the limits of black masculine performance are set. The sexual dance does not necessarily project homosexuality as a norm or an alternative but what it does for certain is imply the sensuality that is available in this atmosphere, for it is directly opposite the same sexual performance that is initiated by the "slim slate colored Martiniquan [dancing] with a gold-brown Arab girl in a purely sensual way. His dog's mouth shows a tiny, protruding bit of pink tongue. Oh he jazzes like a lizard with his girl. A dark-brown lizard and a gold-brown lizard" (50).

The sensual nature of this dance invites one to see how McKay is using his knowledge of his Jamaican background to color the style and movement of the characters. The reference to lizards come from his boyhood background and McKay uses it to capture the sensuality involved in the performance. In the same manner his reference to the ram goat and ram kid, is straight out of his Jamaican experience and shows the play of sexuality of /in the dance. The two men are part of a sexualized spectacularity that is both playful and sensual at the same time, merging homosocial energies and sensibilities with the local social and platonic jousting that requires the use of both the body and mind.

Like these dancers who are not afraid to represent themselves as “the knowing subject” Banjo showcases his music as economic, cultural and political stimuli to give support to what in his mind is a big thing. “Many big things started in just such a little way” (47). This little orchestra would become the model for the black cosmopolis and would mark a shift in the nature and meaning of black culture around the globe because “he would make this dump sit up and take notice” (47). In other words, Banjo’s orchestra seeks to imagine the African diaspora as a home-space where its seemingly disparate subjects can achieve wholeness (the re-assemblage of the broken parts of the body, as in the limbo dance): “A Martiniquan with his mulattress flashing her gold teeth. A Senegalese sergeant goes round with his fair blonde. A Congo boxer struts it with his Marguerite. And Banjo grinning, singing, white teeth great mouth, leads the band” (49). Banjo’s desire to have an orchestra magnifies McKay’s interest in the multiplicity of subjectivities in defining or sustaining black culture.

Finally, these dances that Banjo's orchestra unleashes reflect a very aggressive, powerful, savage and ubiquitous rejection of "the most tumultuous civilization of modern life" (49). Their performance is as much a cathartic one aimed at repossessing life and shaking "down Death and forget his commerce, his purpose, his haunting presence in a great shaking orgy. Dance down the Death of these days, the Death of these ways, in shaking that thing" (57). The rhythmic repetitions of the sentences instantiate how Banjo's music invokes the call and response tradition present in African American culture and represents an exhortation not only to shake off the "death" of capitalism and the ravaging effects of Western concepts of modernity on their sense of expression, but also to perform an investiture – to put on life itself, rooted in their cosmopolitan and cultural heritage. The spectacularity of the dance expresses beyond the capacity of words, the claiming of life and the breaking out of the space of marronage in the space of the bar and café floor.

In this moment, the confluence of interlocking diasporan (African American, Caribbean), African and European (some of the musical instruments) forms and tropes is a jazz expression of tidalectics that erases the dialectic where the plantation is half of the equation. The dance floor transforms into a polyrhythmic, maroon circle of fluvial movement that tricks the essentializing gaze of Europeanist prejudice by its exemplification of "unreadable" Chaos "the "dis/order... where it is possible to observe dynamic states and regularities... where every repetition is a practice that necessarily entails difference and a step towards nothingness...a figure as complex, as highly organized, and as intense as the one the human eye catches when it sees a quivering hummingbird drinking from a flower" (Benítez-Rojo 2, 3).

The critique by Brent Hayes Edwards aptly sums up McKay's positioning of this amazing scene:

It is risky...to accept blindly a discourse of "primitivism" without noting the ways that McKay's book twists and wrenches it out of shape. The word "primitive" is always used with a certain sarcasm, as an imposed vocabulary. It is seldom noticed, for instance, that in *Banjo* the discourse cuts both ways: McKay invokes the "jungles of civilization" (194) as much as the "African rhythm of life." And "black primitivism" is not all about instinct and intuition, but is sometimes positioned as the basis of the most rational – albeit unruly – social critique (222).

Edwards identifies the problem that some critics have fallen into by describing McKay as a writer who merely applies "primitivism" as a literary proscription of Euro-American twentieth century white patronage in order to sell his novel. To do so is to avoid the active ingredients of opposition to the depictions of blacks in literature and art as "aping" positivists of Africa. McKay propels this discussion onto more incendiary ground by using the issue of dance and music, two very culturally potent sites of African memory, as the places to demonstrate that "'primitive' [is] the basis of another ethical system, one *exterior* to the crushing logic of 'civilization'" (Edwards 223).

The tidalectics at the ports is replicated in the inner space of the Ditch. At the same time the dialectic of struggle between official authority and maroon powers is evident in the policing of the Ditch. Encircled by the suburbs of the respectable classes, the Ditch's inhabitants could not spill over into those environs without severe penalty. Ray is actually beaten up and thrown into jail for crossing the border into this outer

space. But McKay shows us how these “bums” from the Ditch re/configure the Ditch as a maroon space of safety and interiority that preserves their masculine and human subjectivity not just through spectacular acts such as the dance but through the everyday acts of eating and survival. McKay’s portrayal of the men’s subjectivities is nuanced, as they do not need Banjo’s or anyone’s leadership to live and make visible their human complexity.

Through their social activities, the men form a community that is loosely built around the spaces where they are able to meet, eat and speak. On one level, the cafés and restaurants are spaces of pleasure and entertainment but on another level they are spaces where the men are able to participate in and imagine other forms of black masculine subjectivities mixed up, chaotic and creole. In this manner dance becomes a kind of “diversion” (Glissant 20) – the occupying of another internal or external realm as both a resort and a method of eradication of systems of domination that are not directly tangible (Glissant 19-26). In other words dance is a realm, a state of retreat these men occupy in order to compose other narratives of self that reside in an elsewhere, right under or in the system of domination. In fact these in these spaces Banjo and his crew present alternative definitions and representations of black culture, cosmopolitanism, and manhood. In fact, the occasions of “feeding” whether it be when a ship comes into town or when they sit in a restaurant, reflect on their masculine fraternity and highlight the complex network of relationships that exist in their communities. Eating is more than a social activity; it carries with it signs of brotherhood, conflict and familial camaraderie. The men commiserate over food, joke with each other, share news and even debate with each other. Through the act of eating certain kinds of food, they are able to transport

themselves to their homelands. Food then becomes a site of memory and return by which they escape temporarily the “unhomeliness” of the place they inhabit.

Food and the environment where it is consumed then conveys a range of subversive critiques of broader cultural, social and political issues at work in the state. For the celebration that food allows is constantly twinned with our consciousness of the peculiar situation these men are in: there is a sense that their masculinity is in question and under assault because they are not all or always gainfully employed and therefore not always able to provide their own food. Yet we see again the maroon tightrope walk where the vagabond lifestyle which produces this kind of situation is embraced and revised. The search for and eating of food are not only acts of survival but also conscious acts of disruption to the rigid social order that manages the movement among classes in Westernized society. The various ways in which the men obtain food reflect their alienation and marginalization as migrant black men but it also points to freedoms they have chosen. Their lives poised precariously yet defiantly on the tension point between dependency and freedom articulates the ambiguous realities of maroon negotiation and its insistence on selfhood and subjectivity.

McKay’s treatment of these migrant black men, such as the ones we are introduced to in *Banjo*, highlights how as vagabonds (maroons) they used their “bumming” to effectively show black manhood as a “complex political technology, composed of a variety of institutions, ideas and daily practices” (Gail Bederman 7). Through this activity in the port and Rue Bouterie or Boody Lane as the men called it, civilization, it seems, cannot account for the ontological complexity of the black male’s subjectivity. Thus, he is excluded as respectable and therefore as man. Black manhood in

this case, where it rejects racist capitalism, does not seem to reiterate the “perfection” of Westernized notions of manhood or middle class black manhood, for that matter. McKay’s construction of these men as bums during the inter-war period, signifies upon the “elusive” quality that post World War I interpretations of black manhood prove to have.

The flexibility of definition can be seen in the way McKay uses music, an important cultural and social media for blacks around the world, to emphasize the tidalectics in the delineation of black diasporic masculinities on the world stage. Attention is called to the ways in which diaspora was being formed and negotiated in this migrant setting through the music of jazz or “West Indies Blues” and the other versions that came from the Caribbean isles and Africa. Europe and especially Paris during the Interwar period saw a growing number of Black American (writers, singers, and musicians) retreating to Paris and especially Montmartre, a primarily working class neighborhood “on top of a hill in the northern part of the city’s Right Bank” (Stovall 39). This section of the city “offered the liveliest nightlife in Paris, perhaps the world” (39) according to Stovall and “foreign tourists seeking to be shocked and thrilled by the decadence of Gay Paree usually ended up there” (39). Like Harlem during the 1920’s “Montmartre was a natural place for African Americans to gather during the 1920’s” signaling the rise to prominence of jazz and jazz musicians especially after 1918. Thus, the presence of music in *Banjo* offers a critical commentary not just on the growing popularity of jazz in Europe, but also on the ways in which the performances of these jazzmen increased the viability and visibility of black art in Europe. *Banjo* focuses on another settlement, another maroon enclave that of Marseilles where, as is exemplified in

the scenes at the Café Africain or in the bars in the Ditch, jazz music is an act of insurgency in the way it disrupts the borders governing the social and national lines drawn in the city. McKay's text demonstrates how the music of jazz functioned as a one of the catalytic energies responsible for the practices of diaspora, in as much as it gave Banjo an imagined community and a platform to initiate his plan to form an orchestra that might work:

All shades of Negroes came together there. Even the mulattoes took a step down from their perch to mix in. For, as in the British West Indies and South Africa, the mulattoes of the French colonies do not usually intermingle with the blacks...All the British West African Blacks, Portuguese blacks, American blacks, all who had drifted into this port that the world goes through (*Banjo*, 46).

Here indeed is the cosmopolitan space where a group of "seemingly stateless" beings are bonded together through "the magic" of music. Café Africain reproduces a black cosmopolitan space where Banjo and his crew are removed from the fixity of race and class to a "spacious place" where "all shades of Negroes [come] together."

Ray's entrance into the scenario of the Ditch establishes *Banjo* as an unconventional type of sequel to *Home to Harlem* and allows us to see Banjo as the full flowering of the artistic and passionate promise in Jake. Similarly, the Ray who enters *Banjo* has evolved, or polymorphosed significantly, indicating that the work of marronage as self-definition is an ongoing process and masculinity a fluid and pliant category within that process. It is important that Ray enters the narrative straight after the provocative scene of the great dance where McKay seeks to shock both black and white

observers into seeing blackness not enveloped in seductive exoticism or exotic seductisms but totally irreverent in its freedoms and agency. Ray functions in the novel to broaden the black modernist debate about culture and propaganda, high class and low class subjectivities and practices.

Ray also represents the mature black intellectual who has come to terms with his own internal contradictions and therefore has a clearer eye-view of his role. If Banjo's masculine subjectivity can be read as an artistic and economic authority that grounds itself firmly in the culture from the lower frequencies, Ray's can be seen as an intellectual authority that has found itself through a similar grounding, since he enters the novel reconciled to his inescapable relationship with other black men and indeed the impossibility of writing authentically about black experience without integral and intimate co-existence with those from below. Ray is no longer an isolate but now part of the maroon community of the diaspora. He brings to the circle of the maroon community the information and formal knowledge that amplify Banjo's intuitive artistic vision. Yet Ray and Banjo are not opposites since he is an artist in the making, who wants to "work with pencil and scraps of paper" (66) or become a writer someday. As a critic of Europeanist categories that he had wittingly or unwittingly internalized through his Westernized education, Ray shows the courage of subjectivity as self-examination, the maroon acknowledging his own deep taintedness by the plantation and tunneling into areas of his submerged self to re-invent and set it free.

Ray's entrance is quite instructive because it prefigures the way in which he will displace Banjo as the central character in this text. While in McKay's *Home to Harlem*, when Ray enters, he becomes the sidekick of the leading character Jake, and remains that

throughout the text, in this second novel, Ray takes over the narrative the moment he arrives. In doing so he highlights the inclusivity necessary for the expression of black masculine subjectivities. He becomes Banjo's intellectual counterpart who offers advice, help, and direction at times. In fact Ray is described as "the intermediary" in the chapter entitled "Meeting Up" where Ray encounters Banjo for the first time and saves him from being taken advantage of by a "big slovenly woman" who seemed to own the restaurant. Banjo's danger had been because he does not speak French, in which, as a Haitian Ray is fluent.

Ray's entry marks a shift in the tempo and "lilt" of Banjo's musical sojourn and a new beginning in the narrative as well. Ray is as much and as well traveled as Banjo and as fully qualified to carry the story forward. His presence provides another narrative to balance Banjo's but it also broadens the scope of the debate that revolves around black masculine performativity as maroon subjectivity in Marseilles' migrant, cosmopolitan arena. Ray is immediately at home in the narrative and does not seem to need any introductions or initiations into the plot. This is important as it helps to negate some of the simplistic observations that McKay's novel does not have any form or lacks a narrative structure. Such observations cannot carry any real critical value. It seems as if Ray immediately picks up the story and falls into a "homeliness" where he is already familiar with the environment. "Banjo's rich Dixie accent went to his head like old wine and reminded him happily of Jake. He had seen Banjo before with Maltz and company on the breakwater, but had not yet made contact with any of them" (*Banjo*, 64).

Ray's familiarity is crucial in understanding how relevant he is as the new "protagonist" of the story and how much he fits into this narrative that was already

progressing. The fact that he was an observer in this crowd and had seen Banjo, Maltby and company before, identifies his connection with the story – Ray introduces himself as the character who is already at home in and has a home in the text and in this way elucidates the continuity of the narrative and [the] indeed the continuities of accidental meeting across “the chain of miles” that separates the diaspora. Among the most perceptive analyses of Ray’s entry and role are those by Edwards, Stephens and Holcomb, who variously recognize his symbolism as vagabond politician, writer-figure and teacher. Holcomb’s, the most provocative, by citing Ray in the role of “teacher,” brushes on the fact that Ray’s subjectivity is premised on the notion that he is a student, an insidious maroon discernor in “Europe’s best backdoor” (69). However, Holcomb does not unpack this subjectivity or its meaning for Ray’s masculine project and his presentation as a “vagabond.”

I argue that Ray is a student who has been ardently studying the “great modern movement of life” (69) and the manner in which the Negro life is entangled in this “activity.” Indeed, Ray is concerned with entering and deconstructing “the veritable romance of Europe. This Europe that he had felt through the splendid glamour of history. When at last he did touch it, its effect on him had been a negative one. He had to go to books and museums and sacredly-preserved sites to find the romance of it” (68). What Ray is interested in doing in his voyage as student through this “turbulent civilization of modern life” is to “proclaim to the world that the grandest thing about modern life was that it was bawdy” (69).

In the process he aims to supplant the myth of Europe not just with his own individual words, but with representations of the “naked reality” of the people of his

world. Ray is in search of a language that will transform and translate the lives of his people so that they would not be described as “the underworld” because they were “very much upon the surface” (*Home to Harlem*, 225). This distinction shifts Ray’s character from the isolate of *Home to Harlem*, to the relational (in Glissant’s sense of the term) personality of a cosmopolite.

Integral to Ray’s critique of Europe is his negotiation of new terms for his own creolization as he interrogates his allegiance to and background in European literature and historicity. He feels indebted to this tradition and must pay homage to it, but at the same time, he recognizes that it is the “education” that this history and literature had given him that has numbed his instincts and intellect and made him a “misfit” (*Home to Harlem*, 274). Ray had recognized this dilemma from the time he was in Harlem and this had been in fact at the very core of his flight from Harlem’s black intelligentsia. He muses, in a heated debated with his friend Grant just before he departs for Europe at the end of *Home to Harlem* that “we Negroes ought to get something new. But we get our education like – like our houses. When the whites move out, we move in and take possession of the old dead stuff. Dead stuff that this age has no use for” (*Home to Harlem* 243). Thus, Ray’s transition from one text to another and from Harlem to Marseilles is part of the interrogation of this “education,” the detritus of a rotten civilization. His self-critique marks his awareness of the contradictory omens (Brathwaite) of the creolized sensibility, the risks inherent in the balancing act of negotiating a self-born out of the experience of oppressed and oppressive cultures. His presence in Marseilles marks the open courage with which he is willing to find new spaces of resistance and self-fashioning within that same paradigm of negotiation between world orders.

What Ray grasps after, however, is not a dialectical subjectivity but *free space* engineered in the in-between. In this sense the impetus behind his interrogation of Europe is what I call the “queering” of modernity. When he enters the text, “the urge to write was holding him with an enslaving grip and he was beginning to feel that any means of achieving self expression was justifiable” (65). It is from here that we may begin to examine Ray’s subjectivity as a returning maroon in *Banjo*. In the journey from Harlem to Marseilles, Ray has transformed into the state of vagabondage, a larger unmooring from the close vicinity of the plantation. And so in Marseilles Ray comes to terms with his affinity to and identity with the working class population that he did not want to see himself reflected in when we first met him in *Home to Harlem*. The time traveling and then “drifting by chance into the harbour of Marseilles where he had fallen for its strange enticement just as the beach boys had” (67) gives him the appreciation and insights he needs to fit into the “fine big wide-open hole” of Marseilles. Ray is now ready to “read” and “write” the Negroes of the port. In this process, he speaks himself, his unspoken, fragmented and diffident self into being. He will find the port a counter culture to his “civilized” being; the space with all its “picturesque variety of Negroes” (68) will shatter his vision of self and expose him to “Negroes speaking the civilized tongues, Negroes speaking all the African dialects, black Negroes, brown Negroes, yellow Negroes. It was as if every country of the world where Negroes lived had sent representatives drifting in to Marseilles” (68). Ray begins to see how his subjectivity as a “restless searching” (68) vagabond artist is also touched by this “great vagabond host of [maroon-like Negroes]” (68).

The Ditch offers up to Ray a lesson in his masculine migrations; the relevant traces of the maroon push and pull that drive his search are hidden in these men, flung from every country of the world where Negroes lived. And it is in the experience of Marseilles as a port city that he is confronted through stark, concrete objects –“barrels, bags, boxes bearing from land to land the primitive garner of the [black] man’s hands” (67) by modernity’s prize, the labor of the common black man and sees how Europe continues to use with impunity that labor to reap the “fine harvest of all the lands of the earth” (67). Ray’s cosmopolitan eye and his maroon condition enable him to see the remarkable image and symbol of slavery still circumscribing, even interrogating his subjectivity and that of all black men in general.

Sweat-dripping bodies of black men naked under the equatorial sun, threading a caravan way through the time-old jungles, carrying loads steadied and unsupported on kink-thick heads hardened and trained to bear burdens. Brown men half-clothed, with baskets on their backs, bending low down to the ancient tilled fields under the tropical sun. Eternal creatures of the warm soil, digging, plucking, for the Occident world its exotic nourishment of life, under the whip, under the terror (67).

This description is a “long metaphor” of the plantation as a repeating symbol (Benítez-Rojo’s meta-machine) in the lives of blacks in the Western world. The continuity that Ray sees across the [broken] chain of miles is that black male bodies in this diasporic space are not disconnected from those “naked and half-clothed” bodies working on plantations somewhere “under the tropical sun.” These men who are from all parts of the world form a metonymic tableau for the dialectic of the plantation and

marronage. Contrary to his response to the men in *Home to Harlem*, Ray finds that he is connected to these black men because their bodies carry historical and cultural maps that refer to his. Ray is reading the diaspora and can see the trajectory of his own masculine dis/locations in the bodies of others. Ray comes sees the extent of black male fetishism in the “nakedness” and “half-clothed” images. The fetishized sexualization of their bodies in the service of civilization, commerce and empire building reminds him (most painfully) of his own experience in Paris where he posed in the nude for a Nordic painter as a study for her class and then later in private because the pay was better. It is important that Ray enters this moment of awareness not in response to ideological mandates but in response to the radical emotional experience of shared terror.

The moment is also the turning point in Ray’s growth into a literate imagination, to use Wilson Harris’ phrase (“Literacy and the Imagination” 75-89). Where in Harlem race had annoyed him as an African American obsession, he now informs the Martiniquan student who engages him on the issue of race politics in the chapter “White Terror,” that the distinguishing feature of all Senegalese, Martiniquan, Haitian, or African American members of the African diaspora in the imagination of the West is the adjective “colored” something Ray must be accepted “proudly and manfully” (201). Inherent in this critique is the way in which their divisions are deeply rooted in European categories of nation and nationalisms. Ray further dovetails the discussion into a critique of class, which plagued the Caribbean social landscape, and makes it clear he finds it imperative to distance himself from any proprietary holds on nation or class.

Ray is not only averse to the idea of nation and nationalism but also patriotism. This is of course doubly interesting for the Ray we had seen in Harlem as a new migrant

who was searching for nation in Harlem and who had felt lost without the protective cover of his Haitian nationality because it was robbed from him by the US invasion. He now reads himself as “a child of deracinated ancestry” (137) who had been poisoned by the seed of patriotism. He goes on to say “not having any traditional soil to nourish it [his patriotism], it had died out with other weeds of the curricula of education in the light of mature thought” (137). Ray’s maturity comes from his cosmopolitan life as a vagabond student: “he enjoyed his role as a wandering black without patriotic or family ties. He loved to pose as this or that without really being any definite thing at all” (136).

This placelessness that Ray celebrates is an aspect of his maroon character, the cosmopolite who lives both at the periphery and at the center of a world that treats him as stranger. Ray embraces his “strangeness,” his outa-national self because it allows him to navigate Marseilles with greater flexibility and propriety. “It seemed a most unnatural thing to him for a man to love a nation – swarming hive of human beings bartering, competing, exploiting, lying, cheating, battling, suppressing, and killing among themselves; possessing, too, the faculty to organize villainous rivalries into a monstrous system for plundering weaker peoples” (137).

The odd amnesia that this pronouncement displays about Haiti and its difference from the nationalisms of Europe and the USA suggests again the aporia, the contradictions that the maroon struggles with within himself as he tries to balance between psychological spaces – the terms of what he knows and what he is and must become. Cosmopolitanism as an embrace, and celebration of rootlessness may in this instance be read as a posture of survival, the invention of compensatory psychological strategies for dealing with loss – for if Ray were to allow himself to remember the place

that was once home and which indeed no doubt still has its home within him even as Africa still has its home within the Senegalese, he might not have been able to endure. Ray's perspective at this point may well mirror McKay's, for we recall that McKay never returned to Jamaica. A provocative question that arises is whether McKay would have found nation so easy a category to dismiss if at the time of his leaving Jamaica, like Haiti, had been an independent nation state as opposed to a colony, or if his own country had fought the only true war of revolution in the known world as Haiti had. In this context it is interesting that McKay envisions Africa as a racial-cultural category even though African locations with or without European interventions had their own divisions and vastly different particularities.

The cosmopolitan maroon spirit in Ray has been bred by his wanderings and it now locates him within a social and a cultural space where his instincts lead him to "find his own narrative of black masculinity" (Stephens 191) precisely because he was not driven by someone else's narrative of "intervention and proscription" (*A Long Way From Home* 300). Indeed, Ray like McKay, could imagine himself as an "internationalist," someone who is a "bad nationalist" (*A Long Way From Home* 300). McKay presents a distinctive argument that finds resonance with what Paul Gilroy suggests about how "exile, relocation, and displacement" must be factored in when one considers the character of black culture and art. What is at stake here is the "articulation of a desire to escape the restrictive bonds of ethnicity, national identification, and sometimes even "race" itself" (Gilroy, 19). The transformation of Ray's ties to nation and nationalism is a transformation of self and his desire to transcend these boundaries are a startling

forerunner, sixty-five years in advance, of Gilroy's definition of the "modern political and cultural formation" that he calls the Black Atlantic.

Interestingly, Ray's vagabondage translates into a narrative of love: we are told he finds "individuals and things to love in many places and not in any one nation" (137). This kind of language not only brings intellect, language, art and desire into a reconciliatory space (highlighting again how Ray has transformed into an intellectual of the heart) but it also aligns McKay with the sensibility of Caribbean writer-theorists, who consistently use the language of faith and desire to theorize the region and its literature.³⁰ It is true that Ray intellectually deconstructs the ways nation can work in the same manner as empire, forcing on the subject identities and ways of moving through space that are designed by this invisible hegemony. But it is ultimately on the basis of a philosophy of feeling that Ray rejects patriotism in order to cross one restrictive border for another and live as a maroon, outside the borders of the nation but navigating a new subjectivity as an independent citizen.

The deconstruction of nation is the way in which Ray constructs or contributes to his own marronage. In fact, it is a significant and symbolic act wherein Ray relocates himself into a space where he can design and create a home-space, one that allows him both intellectual and psychological freedoms. These freedoms give Ray the power to interrupt and bring into contestation the space of home. Rather than negotiating a space for himself within the nation, Ray "evicts" himself and establishes an unequivocal masculine subjectivity that is highly individual and based on a particular concept of

³⁰ See Brathwaite's uses of "faith" in *Contradictory Omens*; Lamming refers to himself as an Evangelist in "The Sovereignty of Imagination: An Interview with David Scott"; Walcott uses "grace" in "What the Twilight Says" and "Love" in his Nobel Lecture; Glissant describes his concept of "relation" as an attitude of the sacred in *Poetics of Relation*.

integrity. He is Banjo's twin: Banjo, we recall, had hit on an idea to get himself deported; both have chosen a certain kind of freedom that problematizes and destabilizes citizenship and it is fascinating how Ray too is able to pass or pose as "British, sometimes as American, depending on his audience" (135). In both cases passing is a way of appropriating subjectivity; and in Ray's case as well as Banjo's, "brain magic" penetrates behind the symbolic plantation fence as Ray, who should not be seen as an interloper, but as an informed "participant observer" (to use Michelle Ann Stephens's phrase) "of the mind of the average white man [where] a few words would usually take him to the center of a guarded, ancient treasure of national hates" (135). The rejection of nation and patriotism formally enables Ray to inaugurate guerrilla warfare against the imperial and colonial culture and must be seen as a move to decolonize himself, a similar act that Richard Wright's protagonist in the short story "Five Episodes of an Unwritten Novel" commits (a crime) in Paris so that he does not have to return to the United States.

Ultimately, McKay funnels through Ray's national dis-ease how alienated he himself is from the meanings and constructions of nation that he had encountered in his travels abroad. Scouting the inner and outer rims of the plantation as well as the vast "other horizons" it occludes; he has come to the conclusion that the patriot "loves not his nation, but the spiritual meanness of his life of which he has created a frontier wall to hide the beauty of other horizons" (137). What Ray and ultimately McKay achieves in naming himself on his own terms, without the ideological tools and conventions of Western codes of behavior or normativity, is the actualization of his manhood and the enrichment of his preparation to become a "man of words" (Abrahams, 1983). As Ray declares, he has "grown and broadened and knew better, he could bring intellect to the

aid of instinct [and] rather than lose his soul, let intellect go to hell and live instinct!” (164-5). The balancing act between these two aspects of self remains a difficult and shifting proposition but Ray is fully aware of what is at stake, empowered as he is in self knowledge.

The artist that Ray now envisions himself to be is an enlightened one who is aware of the dynamics that affect the reception of black literature during the 1920's. Ray rehearses again his dismissal of Harlem Renaissance expectations that there were things about black life that should not be written about because they would place black culture and people at a disadvantage and cause whites to continue discriminating against blacks. McKay, through Ray's insistence on writing a story that is based in truth not just fiction, veers away from the kind of literature about and of black life that seeks to use the “proletarian” or working class or folk life but to “doctor” it so that it becomes an affected story of black political or social struggle. Ray echoes Langston Hughes's manifesto about the mission of the New Negro artists. In his 1926 essay, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” Hughes proclaims: “We young artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too. The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their pleasure doesn't matter” (Mitchell 59).

Hughes's statement echoes exactly what McKay does with his literature, which is creating and expressing his dark-skin self without fear or shame. But McKay complicates Hughes' declaration because he refuses to allow anyone, white or black, especially middle class blacks to decide how he should express his dark-skinned self or describe

black culture. So on the one hand, Hughes's projection is similar to McKay's personal feeling about the work and ambition of black writing, that it should represent the complexities of the varieties of blacks around the world. McKay addresses this in his Autobiography, *A Long Way from Home*:

I thought that if a Negro writer were sincere in creating a plausible Negro tale – if a Negro character were made credible and human in his special environment with a little of the virtues and vices that are common to the human species – he would obtain some recognition and appreciation (317).

With this as a background, McKay infuses Ray's desire to write about the men who live in the Ditch with this thought and makes his efforts stand in contrast to what some blacks feel is a betrayal of the race. Ray, like McKay, feels that the Negro race cannot be betrayed by any "real work of art" (*A Long Way From Home* 317) and Ray's attempt to write about this group of "denizens" in the Ditch is about art and its power to convey lived reality. Ray does not intend for his depictions to be reminiscent of all black life or as a means to end racism, colonialism or imperialism, but he wants to write for people "who can stand a real story no matter where it comes from" (*Banjo* 117). Ray's freedom then, is the freedom as an artist to create his version of black aesthetics without the blinding "veil" of Western civilization, and to define the Negro as a "challenge rather than a "problem" to Western civilization" (273). Ray's conclusion is a simulacrum of the book itself, for in *Ray and Banjo*, McKay presents a jazz conversation of artists who embody in themselves and perform through their art the dazzling array and range of artistic media, expression, representation *and* personality available in the black male arena.

Two final observations may be made about Ray and Banjo. Perhaps the most striking aspect of the change that surrounds Ray in Marseilles as opposed to Ray in Harlem, is the absence of spectacularity (in both the negative and positive senses), the quiet unobtrusiveness with which he goes about this business of self-making and community building. The tunneling inwards to the deep inner spaces of the submerged self in order to bring it to light perhaps requires descending from the tightrope, although the balancing act required is no less intense, risky and creatively, multifariously flexible. Indeed we may think of this presentation of Ray as the maroon acrobat's practice within doors, until the performance is truly ready to be given to the world of his commitment. In the terms of maroon warfare, it is the sharpening of his tools and technologies in preparation for new forays and locations of struggle.

Ray is a literary artist in "becoming" Banjo's musical art as well as his verbal art, the hilarious linguistic shape-shiftings through which he visibly elaborates his black masculine subjectivity, belongs to the more spectacularly performative arena and carries moreover a more culturally resonant and therefore more readily and widely accessible language of expression (jazz, blues, black popular culture). So Banjo's maroon performances on the tightrope are immediately available to participant onlookers. Furthermore, Banjo has escaped the trap of elite Western education and armed with his extraordinary iconoclastic, anancy intelligence is much less conflicted with the contradictory omens of creolization between self, Europe, Africa and Euro-America. Banjo pushes the boundaries of cosmopolitanism in a peculiar way. He crafts his technology of cosmopolitanism in a network of interlocking and carefully nuanced steps

that are so successful in helping him elude the plantation, that he comes to inhabit a space where it is possible to argue that marronage is no longer his characteristic persona.

In Bakhtinian terms, his vulgar and profane subjectivity reflects the essence of cosmopolitanism and echoes how Bakhtin describes the marketplace. Like the marketplace, he “enjoys a certain extraterritoriality in a world of official order and official ideology” (*Rabelais and His World* 154). Banjo’s extraterritoriality comes from his “expansive” (Bakhtin 19) imaginations and his travels as a sailor around the world, which have given him a very textured and worldly sensibility. The attribution of extraterritoriality to Banjo gives point to the suggestion that ultimately Banjo’s successful performance of cosmopolitanism is excessive. By this I mean, it seems to exceed the need for marronage, since he breaks out of the circumscription of the plantation circle and its environs and sets up his own independent “free city”(inner psychic space) within the city, which he navigates from the fluid spaces of the Ditch and the port. Yet this is only a contingent reality based on what Marseilles is “willing to be” for the moment and if Banjo has to take flight again, it will be his maroon technologies and sensibilities that he will draw on to create new a subjective space.

And indeed in Part three of the novel Ray’s discourse on the imaginary and mobile concept of home is given point when Banjo leaves the group and it disintegrates. The failure of the group to maintain its community and social viability was a direct result of the changes in the political and cultural climate of Europe. The maritime industry was feeling the effects of these changes and thus colored crews were being replaced by all white crews. The white crew would not feed the beach boys and this left them anxious. These changes were mild compared to how France’s economic climate began to boil over

into their lives. “Suddenly francs were getting scarce in their world. Meals were dearer in the eating-sheds, and in the bistros, and more sous were necessary to obtain the desirable red wine and white, so indispensable to their existence” (222).

Ray had no money and he could not pay his rent, neither could he get any money by “begging, beseeching, versifying, or story-telling” (223). Ray’s destitute self comes on the heels of his arrival at a solid place of self-actualization. Here, his place in the diaspora is vulnerable because he, like the other beach boys, is at the mercy of the French authorities. The atmosphere and tempo of the environment becomes almost dangerous and the men seem to be at risk and are increasingly more visible *now* as “vagrants” and not as “vagabonds.” Through this rift in the lives of the men, the narrative moves forward with a sense of brokenness, a characteristic quality of the modernist narrative. It is this moment when we imagine the jazz-like component of McKay’s narrative and more importantly the impact of music, Banjo’s music, on their lives. Yet the most compelling aspect of this is not the deterioration of the group, as some critics claim, but a gesturing toward what Homi Bhabha describes as the “beyond” (4). Bhabha contends that the term “signifies spatial distance, marks progress, promises the future” (4).

In my mind, the term signifies upon a maroon existence that speaks to the restless nature of migrant beings and the impending threat of invasion or attack from outside forces. The change in fortunes and circumstances for Ray and his companions signifies how contending hegemonic forces can threaten or invade the maroon society. Yet the moment is a revisionary one that invites the world to look at France with different eyes. The jazz like shift in this section of the novel calls into being the body of the migrant and his body as a reminder that “the truest eye belongs to the migrant’s double vision”

(Bhabha, 5). Beyond, therefore is a picture of the restless, revisionary and tidalectic, chaotic space of marronage that is at work in the city's limits. Marseilles is not simply a port city but a pregnant global center where black history and culture was being played out against a hegemonic national culture. This drama was instigating a redefinition of the spatial and cultural communities in France and McKay's men are at the centre of this activity.

It is Marseilles and not Paris that the diaspora is staged to show how migrants from France's colonial outposts and migrants from other parts of the African diaspora will enunciate the emergent cultural and political narratives redefining and revising the nation. McKay's reflection on the breakdown of the group in this final stage of the novel marks this redefinition. The final section of *Banjo* is a narrative of the future of Europe where histories, demography, culture, and race are disturbed with the insurgency of the African diasporic masculinities. Having these "political and cultural imperatives" as evidence of its diasporic and futuristic design, McKay's novel is arguably a "document of a society divided by the effects of [colonialism, World War I, and emigration]" (Bhabha 5).

At the end of the novel Ray finds his muse to be the "waste" of Marseilles and his maroon subjectivity rearticulates his sense of "beyond." This becomes a statement about *Banjo* as a poetics of black cosmopolitanism and about the emerging histories surrounding the romances of African diasporic masculinities as a way of delineating and inscribing marronage. The men of McKay's second novel reimagine Europe's landscape and apply the exigencies of a maroon subjectivity to cast various doubts on the kinds of nationalisms located in imperialism, capitalism and the idea of race. And as characters

who are seeking both the pleasures and promise of the beyond, the elsewhere, the irony is that they are now colonizers in reverse. *Banjo* thus, describes the “demography of the new internationalism [which] is the history of [colonial] migration, the narratives of cultural and political diaspora, the major social displacements of peasant and aboriginal communities, the poetics of exile, the grim prose of political and economic refugees” (Bhabha, 5). What *Banjo* articulates and ironically celebrates in the end through the breaking of the group is the sublimation of empire and the attendant narratives writing and signifying the black body. The novel in this light, and at this particular time in the interwar period, configures the foundation for the birth of the Négritude Movement. In fact, this moment reflects what happens later as the empire writes back against a tradition of colonial imperialistic literary traditions and representations. It is not just a French West Indian induced (r)evolution but an Anglophone one as well.

CHAPTER THREE

“Weh eye nuh see heart nuh leap”: Claude McKay’s Literary Drag Performance in *Banana Bottom*.

Set between the country town of Jubilee and the rural village of the same name, *Banana Bottom* examines turn of the century Jamaican cultural and social value systems through its female protagonist Bitia Plant. The novel opens with the story of Bitia’s purported rape by the village fiddler, Crazy Bow. The white English missionaries, Priscilla and Malcolm Craig become Bitia’s guardian in the aftermath of this incident and they send her off to England to attend finishing school. Her return after seven years is meant by Mrs. Craig, in particular, to show the peasant class of Banana Bottom the ability of education both to redeem the past and to eradicate the instincts of the folk; “Priscilla Craig had conceived the idea of redeeming her [Bitia] from her past by a long period of education without any contact with Banana Bottom, and at the finish she would be English trained and appearing in everything but the color of her skin” (31).

The Craigs’ plan included shaping Bitia in their own image and preparing her to continue their “work” as missionaries and warders of a colonial system designed and aided by religion to dull and nullify the wayward, recalcitrant appetites of the folk. Thus, this project was to be supported by another ‘native’ Herald Newton Day who was Malcolm Craig’s heir apparent and, by fiat of the Craigs, Bitia’s betrothed. However, in response to the Craigs’ insistence that she marry a “refined” black minister and devote her life to missionary work (religion), Bitia takes flight from Jubilee, the site of the mission, to Banana Bottom, the cradle, or to use Brathwaite’s term, the “capsule [culture]” of “unrefined folk life” (Source and page number missing).

Bita's flight from the mission takes several forms: she rejects the refined black minister, Herald Newton Day, for her father's drayman Jubban and the life of an educated "Christian," assistant "white" lady, for the heteroglot, syncretic life of an educated peasant. Bita is therefore not bifurcated or wrestling with the kind of double consciousness that W.E.B. Dubois describes in *The Souls of Black Folk*. She is comfortably creolized between carnival and a deeply religious sensibility that expresses itself between church and secular practices, intellectuality and sensuous passion, thoughtful restraint and sensual abandon. Bita's choice also includes an artistic sensibility poised between an oral/literary and performative/philosophical tradition of the folk, and one in which, tellingly, the English Romantics and French philosopher Pascal predominate. Bita's flight is not precipitate but carefully graded and thought out as a response to the arousal of her deeply rooted emotional and cultural impulses. Her flight is a series of thoughts, actions and responses that show her maroon sensibility and consciousness.

These steps that Bita takes are not so much cartographies of maturational development as they are semiotics that reveal, or bring to the surface, a self that had been hidden in marronage. By this I mean that Bita's resistant, creole Jamaican self had been submerged under the nice manners and ethic of obedience to her foster parents' mission-house orthodoxy, but as she got more in touch with the folk and the folk environment, these submerged aspects of self began to emerge and to "take flight" from the site of their burial. Bita's emancipatory journey back to Banana Bottom and the free space of herself is an exact unraveling of previous cartographies, since she had initially left Banana Bottom for the mission in Jubilee and then left Jubilee for England and, by extension, her

free existence for the graduated accretions of Englishness. The Bitá who returns is not fully the Bitá who had left but a free person whose subjectivity emerges at the site of politic negotiation between her folk technologies and the benefits of what she had learnt through her English education; both of these join the arsenal of maroon technologies she has acquired. Bitá's actions reflect the element of choice, the refusal of an identification as victim or protégée that is crucial to the nature and behavior of a maroon. Ultimately Bitá's reclaiming of self also assumes an authoritativeness that McKay presents as a form of masculine subjectivity. It is at the site of this subjectivity that it is possible to argue that Bitá is McKay himself returned in drag.

This is the major argument of this chapter, as I examine the fit between the biographical evidence of McKay's life, his characterization of Bitá Plant as a maroon figure returning to "the point of entanglement" (Glissant 26), and the continuum of the profile of masculine subjectivity from Jake/ Ray to Banjo/Ray to Bitá. I posit the idea of Bitá as McKay's maroon self returned in drag on two bases: one, that the life of a vagabond troubadour and the habit of literary self-portrait had so become second nature to McKay, that he was unable to inhabit a less ambiguous, less trickier persona; two, that McKay's unresolved issues with his mother and father play out as impersonation, ventriloquism, reconciliation, exorcism and homage in the figure of Bitá. McKay's lifelong and haunting need to return to the country of his birth played out in this literary disguise in which, if we also see Bitá as Jamaica developing a decolonized subjectivity, her move is from (feminized) territory to an authoritative republic of the self. I am here recognizing (not giving allegiance to) the ways the concept of the republic, like all concepts of the state, are generally considered in political discourse as masculine.

Almost from the moment Bitá returns to Jubilee from England, she rebels and resists the expectations and eventual constraints imposed on her body and subjectivity. Even after Priscilla Craig's attempt to make her a "tabula rasa," Bitá is unable to repress her desire for and love of the folk. This causes tremendous concern for the Craigs especially because Bitá's rebellion threatens to destroy the map for her life that Priscilla had so carefully plotted for her. It is clear that Bitá always knew that she was a "guinea pig," a lab rat that was being experimented upon:

It had never been lost upon her, from the time that the Craigs had adopted her after the rape, that she was the subject of an experiment, and as she grew in understanding she had voluntarily conceded herself as one does to a mesmerist. Neither had she ever been blind to the advantages of it as compared with her peasant heritage. She had never had any anxiety, never had to think about the future. And now to prolong that state indefinitely and forever she had simply to go straight through the motions of compliance with automatic gestures in harmony with the decorous righteousness of the mission life. Her little essays at independence and the resultant passages with Priscilla Craig had indicated clearly the way she would have to go if she were to reap the ripe benefits of that experiment (109-110).

Bitá evidently is emphasizing she is not "blind to the advantages" of being "the subject of an experiment" and ultimately invites us to see that she will manipulate and negotiate this experiment not for the benefit of the Craigs or the mission but for herself.

Thus, we see Bitá already in the process of marronage; that is, of setting up a series of flights from the Craigs.

The Craigs represent a particular face of the colonial system, the benevolent one whose actions are cloaked in the “mission” to save the blacks or, as McKay asserts, “to preach the Word to the Quashees. To bring to the jungle creatures Light” (12).³¹ The Craigs’ desire is to make noble savages of Bitá and the folk of Jubilee and Banana Bottom. In fact, they are not able to see in the black folk of these locations anything that bespeaks worth or competence of any sort. What is evident in such benevolent types is their attempt to erase the humanity from the folk class and impose on them the stereotype that demarcates the limits of black mobility and access only to a certain point on the island. The Craigs symbolize this plantation psychology, and Bitá’s eventual “bolt” from them and the mission is flight from this colonial bondage.

Homi Bhabha’s notion of “mimicry” (85-92) is important here because it describes the acts of the Craigs as colonials. Like the colonial administration, they seek to “discipline the colony” and by extension Bitá, her body, her sexuality and her moral form. By sending Bitá away to be educated, their intent was to contain and discipline her so that she would be a party to their subjugation of her. Bitá was to have the illusion that she is an “equal” to the Craigs and also that what she was being given in the form of education was her humanity – that which was taken from her in the first place. At the same time she was expected to approximate only the status of honorary or assistant white; that is to say, to be mimic without being wo/man. Mimicry conceived by the Craigs is a deliberate attempt to pre-empt rebellion. However, the very education that Bitá receives

³¹ Quashee is a derogatory name for Blacks in the West Indies. It also means that the person described in this manner is stupid as well.

in England equips her with tools to fuel her own resistance and thwart the Craigs and colonial authority. The irony of mimicry that Bhabha recognizes appears in Bitá as the maroon quotient: the unseen (to the Craigs) aspect of the folk culture and sense of self that twins with the tools of mimicry as self negation to produce technologies of self-fashioning and empowerment.

Bitá's time in England has exposed her to broader politics that include the women's suffrage movement and other socio-political currents which exert a profound influence on her life. The Craigs seem to have been either unaware of such movements, being too long removed from England, or too confident in Bitá's inability to see herself implicated in such developments. Ultimately, Bitá returns as a feminist who had been educated in the inquietude of the beginning of the twentieth century. For "Queen Victoria had died with the nineteenth century" (45) writes McKay. Bitá sits at the center of this inquietude and returns to Jamaica "full of ideas...Socialist, Feminist, and Freethought" (45). Bitá, thus, returns a Caliban with the gift of Prospero's language and the power to relinquish Prospero's hold over her, by her ability not merely to curse him, in Shakespeare's terms, but, in Lamming's terms, the power to reshape this language into a technology of self-invention and self-liberation (*The Pleasures of Exile* 13). When she considers her future on the night of the experience where she was *religiously moved* by the sights, sounds, and rhythms of the public theatre that was the Jubilee market, we see her initiating the first in the series of insurrections that eventually plot her flight back to Banana Bottom.

While the market acts as catalyst, her meeting with her childhood friend Belle Black, her walk home with Hopping Dick, and the swell and press of the crowd (40-1)

strike Bitá just as powerfully. In response to the color, the smell, and press of the crowd and the “full hum of the broad broken speech mounting and falling in strong waves under the sheer downright sun” (40), Bitá’s submerged self begins to emerge. It is as though her cultural roots have laid down a trammel of history in her being, and these rise from underground in answer to this return encounter. The insurrection that takes place is an integral part of Bitá’s maroon sensibility. The sensation she feels and which ties her to this “familiar kindred humanity” (40) is the stirrings of the self in marronage, one that is being baptized in the flood of memories that were always lodged in her bones. It is significant that McKay uses this metaphor of baptism simultaneous with images of sensuality to describe the moment. Bitá’s baptism exposes a highly charged sensual experience and atmosphere in which she responds “to the feeling, the smell, the swell and press of it” (40) and the “falling and mounting in strong waves”(40) of “accents and rhythms, movements and colours, nuances that might have passed unnoticed” (41) gave her “an impulse to touch and fondle” (41).

Here is the first moment of insurrection from below: in crossing the unsanctioned borders between the spiritual and the sensual, the contemplative and the sensuous, McKay announces Bitá’s rejection at a visceral level of the strictly policed psychology that Mrs. Craig not only enunciates but also enacts in her own Victorian ideologies. Bitá’s moment of insurrection casts doubt upon and magnifies Priscilla Craig’s closed self and sensibilities. Mrs. Craig, who tries to police Bitá’s body, sexuality and expressions like her own, would rather hide her slippers, left inadvertently under her husband’s bed, than have the maid realize she had sexual intercourse with her husband the night before. It is important to note that the “free big feeling” of the market scene that

initiates Bita's insurrection is paralleled to Priscilla's home space where Bita resides but to which Bita is reluctant to hurry back. And the menacing borders of Priscilla's world and worldview are thus symbolically represented in her son, a mental paralytic who dies of what the folk graphically term "knot-guts," or constipation. Bita rejects Priscilla's hegemonic retardations threatening the emergence of her maroon self. Bita's self emerges out of two great literary traditions. She comes to our attention through the oral culture of the people of Banana Bottom and becomes a permanent fixture in the memory of the people from the ditty that is made up about her after the "rape" by Crazy Bow: "You may wrap her up in silk/ you may trim her up with gold,/ And the prince may come after/To ask for your daughter,/ But Crazy Bow was first" (14). This song historicizes Bita's first sexual affair in the collective memory of the community, propelling Bita into a spectacular visibility. Indeed, even as she is written into being by McKay, Sister Phibby Patroll, the preeminent "village looselip," is also writing Bita by taking the tale with great relish to Priscilla Craig. Bita is part of a tradition of gossiping and storytelling that is significant to the traffic of news and information in the folk culture.

What is significant is that neither the community nor Sister Phibby are objectifying Bita as entertainment; they are enacting with great glee their satisfaction that the colonial project has been severely undermined by Crazy Bow's prior inscription of folk feeling within Bita's body. In this light it is significant that Crazy Bow, the mixed race (racially creolized) "madman" of the village, who has so much music in his bones, takes flight from the stultifying confines of colonial schooling and roams the wild in-between and outer spaces around the village in maroon freedom. The community has invested a great deal of faith and their own self image in Bita and so their nervousness

upon her return, exemplified in such responses as Belle Black's readiness to be hostile if Bitá puts on any airs, speaks to their understanding of the risks involved in this tightrope walk by which one must either successfully wrest one's self empowerment out of the project of mimicry or fall into the planter's trap.

Bitá embraces this culture of oral commemoration, wit and irony expressed in town and village entertainments such as the tea meeting, another manifestation of marronage in its marrying of seeming carnival frivolity with the political intent of its history as a fundraiser for free village purchase, and its contemporary political intent of ignoring Mrs. Craig's fulminations against such heathen ways. But Bitá equally enjoys reading the classics and the education she received while living in England and traveling in Europe as well. She finds pleasure in the tea meetings in the same manner that she enjoys reading William Blake's poems "and little stories of famous men and women such as 'Michelangelo and his Faun' and 'Florence Nightingale and her Lamp'" (140).

Bitá's ability to integrate various aspects of self, culture, and experience that in colonial and Europeanist discourses are seen as binaries define her as a maroon subject. She has the ability to mix these seemingly oppositional elements in such a manner that refutes positivist Western epistemologies. The folk and the classical, the intellectual and the emotional, the foreign and the native, the carnival and the promenade, the fragmented and the whole, the erudite and folk wisdom, the religious and the profane, the "masculine" and the "feminine," all are elements of Bitá's self that on the surface seem contradictory but are not. These oppositional elements celebrate her as a complex figure who elides singular or homogenous states. Ironically, what this demonstrates is Bitá's "wholeness." Whereas Jake and Ray in *Home to Harlem* and Banjo and Ray in *Banjo: A*

Story without a Plot respectively, may be read as split consciousnesses; that is, sides of a composite self, McKay presents Bita as a fully integrated persona.

Bita's maroon persona is also evident in her creolized occupation of space. The fact that she is an integrated self who lives on the symbolic plantation of the mission house with the Craigs, enables her to live within, occupy, and move in and out of multiple spaces with freedom; specifically, Bita's creole personality places her strategically to manage her resistances within, at the edge of, and away from the plantation. We take note of Bita's negotiations in Jubilee at the mission house, where she is never openly disrespectful to Mrs. Craig, and in church singing with the choristers, where she performs religious conformity with great and spectacular aplomb. But she brings rebellion to the "homespace" (the plantation is her old and paradoxical homeland,) to use Benítez Rojo's words (quoted in Bolland 162), especially through her attendance at the tea meetings, her relationships with Yoni Legge and Belle Black, who goes with her to her homecoming in Banana Bottom, much to the disapproval of Mrs. Craig, and her dalliances with Hopping Dick, the village ram. These "rebellions" are part of a network of signs that guide and shape the manner in which she breaks her confinements. Perhaps the "worst" of them is her friendship with Squire Gensir, the iconoclastic ethnographer from England who stays outside the plantation circle, and who may be seen as the fifth column or traitor who undermines the plantation from within by not only becoming a maroon himself but also by aiding and abetting Bita in her maroon activities.

At the heart of Bita's maroon subjectivity is her location between the symbolic free villages of Jubilee and Banana Bottom. Jubilee represents in spirit and in symbolic socio-historical manifestations the performance of emancipation in the ex-slaves'

purchasing of land or, where it was abandoned, taking over of land to establish autonomous enclaves, often with the help of religious leaders. Jubilee, on a metaphoric level, explains and identifies Bita's exultant "return" or re-integration into her "hometown," marked as "an eventful week for the folk of the tiny country town of Jubilee and Banana Bottom" (1). Bita's return and re-integration into her home marks the culmination of a "united self." And this is the moment of McKay's triumph as a literary artist. He is able to achieve something that eluded him in his other two novels, the unification of intellect and passion, Ray and Jake, citizen and vagabond, male and female, foreign and native. Jubilee is, therefore, McKay's homecoming. It is his attempt to reconcile his vagabond motives and divided selves through this female persona. Furthermore, Jubilee represents the celebration of the writer's beginnings in Jamaica as a cultural surveyor and a proletarian, a champion of the folk. Indeed, Bita in this the final novel is Claude McKay, and Jubilee is finally liberation for both McKay and his female character, Bita Plant.

Bita Plant comes into this geo-political landscape by entering a collective unconscious where the people of the community are negotiating a maroon sensibility. For in this Free Village settings are the living examples of independence who have a political allegiance to what they feel. The very rituals that are practised in the village and which Bita is forbidden to attend are rooted in the practice of maroon technologies, because the tea meetings were events that raised money to buy land to establish some of these free villages. In addition, the Mission house is an isolated static place/space in Jubilee; the people of the village have very little access to it. There are very few times when it is opened up to the rest of the community. We see Phibby Patroll enter this space

under the pretense of taking “gifts” of food kind in order to convey the story of Bitá’s “fall” to the missionaries.³² In other instances, we see Jordan Plant’s wife, Aunt Nommy enter to “talk sense” into Bitá soon after she declares to the Craigs that she plans to marry Hopping Dick. And there is a moment when Hopping Dick accompanies Bitá from the market to the gate but never enters.

The play on “Phibby” is evident in this case, as in other moments in the text, where McKay uses the names of his characters to signal another narrative working on another level in the text. Phibby’s name brings up the British expression for liar, fibber. A “fib” is insignificant or childish lie and the word has its origins in the word “fable.” McKay captures the echoes of liar/fable connotations in implicating “Phibby,” not only as a liar but also as a ‘storyteller’, one who weaves narratives to manipulate the states of order and disorder within the community. In this case, “Patroll” is significant because it echoes the sense of control, surveillance, and power in such a personality. Miss Phibby is a gatekeeper of sorts, one who initiates, whether deliberate or not, others and herself into the semiotics of the oral. Yet Sister Phibby’s actions, especially when we see her later exposing Yoni Legge’s trysts with Hopping Dick in the church vestry, reflect the ways of the “patta-roll” (patrol), an organization of whites who patrolled the country side during slavery. They were paid by American slave owners to whip slaves who were caught wandering or roaming from their plantations especially in the nights.

In its ironic state of reverse marronage (meaning, in this sense, isolation) the mission signifies once again upon the plantation, its economics, its geography, its

³² In Jamaican parlance, “fall” is an expression that signifies the disgrace of a young woman or a girl especially if she becomes pregnant before she is married. It implies that the woman’s reputation is ruined as a result. “Fall” in the biblical sense of the word, is fall from Grace, i.e., in the Garden of Eden – Eve then Adam’s sin – which was a sexual violence.

machinery. In this state, the Mission house assumes a discriminating and policing value in its presence both physical and psychological in the lives and minds of the villagers. But Bitá practises modes of infiltration and foray undetected within its gates and in every case the Craigs could read Bitá's actions as acquiescence or support for their policies. Reading the Mission house as the symbolic plantation space, Bitá seizes from it technologies of resistance first, to occupy this geo-political space where she had been brought as a captive against her will, and second, to map onto it her own authority and independence. Her actions are in the same manner that the ex-slaves seize available land to establish their own communities. In this mode, McKay uses Bitá's subjectivity to ironize and satirize the plantation system as a space and an economy that cannot support itself. It is through Bitá's creolization, the expression of her maroon sensibility and cultural self, her crossing of borders and collapsing of boundaries, her attempts to represent different ways of being, and her constant negotiating and seizing of space that her composite character, her wholeness becomes visible. She becomes McKay's ideal character and the culmination of his journey home. This is the first basis on which Bitá introduces McKay as a masculine other, in drag.

Bitá performs a masculinity that does not inhere in sex but in consciousness and a maroon consciousness at that. In that regard, the accusation that McKay is sexist is worth exploring more closely, especially because as Winston James so convincingly explains, McKay's "unforced and sympathetic portrayal of women is one of the most consistent themes in [his] works from beginning to end, fiction as well as non-fiction, poetry as well as prose. This motif is under-explored in the critical literature on McKay" (James 100). James goes on to state that as a Fabian socialist McKay must have been influenced by the

“feminist component in the movement’s ideology...and McKay also read many of the women writers of Victorian Britain” (112). McKay’s interaction and debates with his brother U-Theo “probably shaped his perception of the condition of women in Jamaica” (112) James argues. McKay’s feminist background supports his return in woman version with a masculine performativity that critiques the condition of women in Jamaica’s colonial space. By performing as woman, and a male in drag, McKay initiates a series of questions against the social and cultural borders that confine and restrict denizens of the colony as extensions, albeit subordinates, of the [English] nation state.

This masculinity that Bitá inhabits is embedded in a combination of social and cultural norms that “conjures up power legitimacy and privilege” (Halberstam 2). These social norms identify the male body, and its attendant gendered constructions as sources of agency or power. The Caribbean space, with its creolized subjectivities, its Chaotic historico-cultural geo-politics confound these constructions because both male and female alike perform the masculine. The creole cultural manifestations of the Caribbean reiterate the ambiguity and complexity of gender in both the psychology and presence of the Caribbean. Masculinity has to be seen as a product of this creole experience and therefore is a “continual dynamic process” (Bederman 7). It is from this creole space that Bitá/McKay, who appears in drag, comes to claim “certain kinds of authority” to question the legitimacy and the strength of any principle that police sex, sexuality, gender or identity.

In essence, Bitá’s masculinity is a cultural process wherein her habitation of and signification on this gendered sign as an iconic structure or force is an ironic and satirical seizure of authority and power. While visiting Banana Bottom in response to her father,

Jordan Plant's request to come to the assistance of her ailing Aunt Nommy, Bitá goes for a swim in Martha's Basin, a site of childhood memories. After observing a group of five boys, "truants from school, standing naked upon a ledge, remarking their armpits and groins for signs of hair and arguing how much time it would take for them to be full fledged men" (116). Bitá swims naked in this space "where the school boys bathed (116) ...round and round in the hole ...on her back to enjoy the water cooling down on her naked breasts" (116; 117). Such an act demonstrates Bitá's seizure of masculinity to reinforce her maroon self while destabilizing the overwhelming influence of the Craig's hegemony on her life. In fact, by swimming in this "male space," Bitá redeploys the gendered construction of the space "where school boys bathed" because her return to this space "where she had lived some of the happiest memories of her girlhood, with her school mates and alone" (117), highlights how the space where school boys bathed, becomes a portal through which she gains access to her feminine and masculine instincts. It is here that she revels in the psychological marronage that the space offers her. She says: "How delicious was the feeling of floating! To feel that one can suspend oneself upon a yawning depth and drift, drifting in perfect confidence without the slightest intruding thought of danger" (117). Bitá's nakedness is a refusal to submit to the threat of danger as a deterrent to own the space like the "boys." Bitá does not act in the manner of a female or a girl whose condition by the expectations or boundaries that drive masculine or feminine subjectivities. Even when she discovers that Tack Tally had been spying on her in the swimming hole and that he had taken her close, she is not self-conscious about confronting him and scolding him about his actions.

Bita's masculinity is thus a hermaphroditic positionality in which the term masculine refers not to biological sex but to that aspect of self definition invested with the impulse to name identificatory practices³³ and ultimately "queer" masculinity in the process. Bita's masculinity performs as maroon technology and aids McKay's performance in drag to cast doubt on the maleness of masculinity. Masculinity performed in this manner gives McKay the opportunity to inhabit the gender gap through Bita's masculinity. In addition, it also gives McKay the opportunity to become Bita and inhabit that "queer" part of him that was in Ray's character in *Banjo* in a more fully integrated way. Thus, masculinity in this context is not invested in a man but in Bita's masculine performance of McKay in drag.

I am claiming, further, that McKay performs as Bita in order to return to his home; and while one must recognize the dangers of such an autobiographical conclusion, there are certain parallels in the novel and in his life that make this conclusion intriguing at least. McKay has shown in his writings and correspondences a sustained desire, indeed yearning to return to Jamaica. Both autobiographies, *My Green Hills of Jamaica* which recounts his boyhood days in Jamaica and *A Long Way from Home* are literary rehearsals of McKay's yearning for home. In his poems he represented his nostalgia and longing, seen most powerfully in "I Shall Return."

I shall return again; I shall return
To laugh and love and watch with wonder-eyes
At golden noon the forest fires burn,
Wafting their blue-black smoke to sapphire skies.
I shall return to loiter by the streams
That bathe the brown blades of the bending grasses,
And realize once more my thousand dreams
Of waters rushing down the mountain passes (*Complete Poems*, 167)

³³ I am drawing on this definition from Forbes' *Nation and Diaspora* where she provides a parallel definition of femininity at the bottom of p.225.

However, of all the works, *Banana Bottom* is the only one in which there is an actual return to Jamaica. *Banana Bottom* is also the only novel where there is a relationship with or a return to parent figures. As Winston James notes, McKay always contrasts his parents and his father is usually described with less affection, and portrayed as austere, authoritarian and quick to mete out corporal punishment to his children (title of book and page number missing). As a result, the young McKay grew up alienated from his father and harbored some resentment towards him. Bita then is the vehicle by which McKay rectifies his relationship with his own father; that is, bridges the gap, both physical and emotional between them.

This reconciliation is negotiated as a form of suturing of a tripartite split, or tearing: between Bita's relationship with Priscilla Craig, who performs a role aligned with the authoritarianism (as opposed to authority) associated with male hegemony, which is by extension also colonial/imperial hegemony; Squire Gensir, Bita's mentor, who assists in her gradated flight from Priscilla and the colonial mission; and Bita's father, Jordan Plant, with whom she has a wholesome, healthy and mutually respectful relationship, albeit, significantly, we scarcely ever see her in interaction with him. Since Jordan is head of the household to which Bita flees in *Banana Bottom*, we may align him with the arrival at a full reconciliation with and emergence to light of the marooned self that *Banana Bottom* symbolizes. The scarcity of scenes between him and Bita parallels the notion that for McKay, this healthful father/daughter-son relationship is more a dream imagined than a fact realized. But his ability to write this relationship itself becomes a form of healing.

Later in this discussion, I examine Priscilla's dual role as a colonial mother figure in Bita's life. In the context of this present part of the discussion, it is important that Priscilla's role as a "father" figure is the first fathering we see up close, especially as it relates to Bita. And though Jordan is mentioned, the actual interactions are between Bita and Priscilla. McKay invests in Priscilla Craig the characteristics of his own father, Francis McKay. While I mentioned this idea in passing before, I want to unpack the significance of this drag performance to Bita's marronage and McKay's return as Bita. Mrs. Craig inhabits a colonial-patriarchal masculine identity within the mission house and the manner in which she manages Bita's life shows someone whose sense of power is materialized in the possession of body and mind. She is a colonizer and is brutish in the dissemination of dominance. She seizes authority both from her husband and from the tradition of missionaries who are her peers and forebears, who had come to the island to save the Quashees. For example, Malcolm Craig does not have room to speak as an adult or as her partner in the mission and when he does she authorizes his speech.

She seems to lack emotional attachment to anyone, especially her crippled son whom she all but abandons to the maid. She silences both males in the house, and ostensibly makes Malcolm Craig a cripple as well. Patou is a constant reminder of Mrs. Craig's imperfection and by presiding over Bita, she corrects and conceals this flaw by following a rigid code of masculine dominance and competitiveness to control Bita's fate. In her biological role as mother, Priscilla was not able to control the outcome of her son's birth but in Bita's case, by inhabiting a masculine authority she tries to prevent the same thing from happening twice. Thus, McKay places her in drag as well and complicates her role by signifying on his own relationship with his father, highlighted

through the authoritarian and controlling manner his father used to govern their relationship.

One can see another parallel in McKay's biography where Squire Gensir in *Banana Bottom* is McKay's mentor and benefactor, Walter Jekyll, an Englishman who renounced his British imperial culture and upper class status for a life among the peasants (a life he could afford). Squire Gensir's appearance in the novel is not an accident because McKay dedicates the novel to Walter Jekyll. In the Author's Note, McKay acknowledges that "all the characters, as in my previous novels, are imaginary, excepting Squire Gensir."³⁴ Squire Gensir satisfies the same purpose in Bitá's life as Jekyll did in McKay's. He partly enabled McKay's intellectual and literary growth; he was responsible for encouraging McKay's publication of poetry in Jamaican English. Squire does something similar for Bitá by encouraging her interest in the arts of the folk where she can see the music of the folk alongside Mozart and learn tolerance of Obeah in the same way she does not question the "Druids, the Greek and the Roman gods and demi-gods and the Nordic Odin" (125) which she learns about in her studies. Squire Gensir inducts Bitá into a maroon heritage and a creole culture in much the same way that Jekyll inducted McKay into "nation language."³⁵ McKay's writing and publishing of a poetry collection in Jamaican vernacular language in the 1920s was an extraordinary act of maroon empowerment and encroachment, when we consider that more than 40 years later debate still raged over whether writers of respectability should use creole language.

³⁴ See the Author's Note at the beginning of the novel where he claims: "This story belongs to the Jamaican period of the early 1900's, and all the characters, as in my previous novels, are imaginary, excepting perhaps Squire Gensir."

³⁵ Edward Kamua Brathwaite defines nation language as the "kind of English spoken by the people who were brought here to the Caribbean, not the official English now, but the language of slaves and laborers, the servants who were brought in with the conquistadores". (*History of the Voice* 5).

Squire Gensir is actually the person who initiates one stage of Bitá's flight from the plantation. It is in his instruction to Bitá that "it was the art of knowing how to eliminate the non-essentials that militate against plastic living and preventing accumulations, valuable or worthless" (120) that she is introduced to the act of tightrope walking. In this moment, Bitá explicitly and at a conscious as opposed to intuitive level, begins to reconcile her two selves, to straddle the world her education gave her and the one she inherited as a result of her birth in a Caribbean space. Squire Gensir shows Bitá the meaning of Creole as the birth of something different, new, significant, through the very same thing that Crazy Bow represented, the folk music:

The Squire showed Bitá a native tune that he had written down, music and words. It was a tune that had been known up there in the heart of the hill country for years and which was fiddled and sometimes sung to a dance called the mento, perhaps a native name for the minuet. But what had excited the squire was his discovery that with little variation of measure the melody was original Mozart (123 -124).

While Squire Gensir is mistaken in his description of "mento" as Mozart, since it is African derived, his error sets up an interesting "diversion" for Bitá who imagines the plantation as a place where maroon technologies abound in how slaves would create and recreate various forms of art from what they heard, saw and did on the plantation. Bitá imagines the ingenuity of a slave who would steal the music he hears being played in the great house and later recreates it for the other slaves. This act of 'diversion' imagines the kinds of creolizations that are evident in her own body, in her subjectivity, making her realize that she is not meant to be "pure" or "civilized." This moment, as problematic as it

is, teaches her that “everybody borrows or steals and recreates in art. Next to enjoying it, the exciting thing is tracking down sources and resemblances and influences” (124).³⁶ Bitá’s encounter with Squire Gensir helps her to confront the self-hate and intolerance that Western education has imposed on her. This confrontation leads her to finally confront Mrs. Craig’s oppressive authority and thus return her gaze, not as a heathen to a Christian but as a maroon who has come into creoleness, her own authoritative space of subjectivity.

McKay’s appearance in drag in this novel equally implicates the role of his mother in his life. The very fact that the novel makes few references to Bitá’s biological mother reflects on the level of pain that McKay is negotiating in his return. Even though he lost his mother at age 19, she became ill soon after his birth and “suffered for the remainder of her life from heart disease” (Wayne Cooper, 10). In fact, Cooper observes that in *My Greens Hills of Jamaica*, in trying to recall his mother in the chapter entitled “The Death of My Mother” McKay conceded that he could not “distinguish between the actual remembrance of an accident at age two and the later telling of it. Then abruptly, he stated, ‘one thing I do remember sharply is that my mother was ill right after I was born’” (10). In *Banana Bottom*, Bitá’s mother dies in childbirth, when Bitá, a “seven-month baby,” is born. “The village folk said that she had killed her mother. That was the way the black peasants referred to a child that survived when the mother had died in giving birth to it” (7).

This biographical similarity bears out the kind of pain, the quality and endurance of loss as a significant absence in McKay’s life. There seems to be some further

³⁶ Derek Walcott makes a similar point in this essay “The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?” (3-9).

unresolved guilt that McKay has harbored in the aftermath of his mother's death.

Winston James observes that

Carl Cowl, McKay's friend and last literary agent said that McKay also felt guilty because not only did his mother die early but also McKay was not at her bedside when she died. Young Claude had left his mother for a short time to go to the field and she died before he returned. It was always self-recriminating anguish that McKay remembered the circumstances of his mother's death (19).

This event was memorialized in the haunting poem "My Mother." McKay was obviously devoted to his mother because when she took ill while he was an apprentice living with U-Theo in Montego Bay, he returned to attend to her. He even wrote several poems in her memory and "when he went to America his first works were published under the nom de plume of Eli Edwards, a masculinization of his mother's maiden name, Elizabeth Edwards" (James, 19). His return in drag highlights then his effort to re-visit the site of his initial trauma and confront the unresolved pain that has settled in his soul as a kind of longing, an emptiness even. Thus, I want to suggest that the absence of any reference to Bita's mother except in the opening pages of the novel is the acknowledgement of the significant void that his mother has left in his life. I want to suggest further that by omitting his mother/Bita's mother from the narrative, except for this moment of "silence" when he tells the circumstances of her death, McKay tries to lay his mother to rest and resolve his own pain.

McKay's drag frame complicates Bita's mother(ing) around a triad of mother types in the novel, in the same way that it complicates around the paternal triad. Bita's mother's death leaves her in the care of her Aunt Naomi (Aunty Nommy) who "took her

sister's place and became Bitá's stepmother" (7). Aunty Nommy, the woman whose garden marries trained order to wild abandon (50), is a product of Banana Bottom and of course therefore contributes to the free spirit that is Bitá. Later after Bitá's "unfortunate incident" Priscilla Craig assumes the role of mother figure to Bitá. Her intent is not just to train Bitá as an exhibit (17) but to also adopt her as her daughter. At the level of the narrative, McKay's drag subjectivity works with Mrs. Craig who is presented as having serious problems with her own gendered identity:

Mrs. Craig could not stand the idea of adopting a boy, with her own son living in a cripple-idiot state...and the failure in making a son of her own made her heart revolt. A girl could never arouse in her that inexplicably bitter resentment that a boy would (27).

Mrs. Craig rejects the idea of adopting a boy in order to hide the shame she feels toward her own child. She is not comfortable around Patou and the narrator shows that in a subtle but powerful way she despises his "invalidity". So the appearance of McKay as Bitá serves to highlight the need Mrs. Craig has to be a mother, not just any mother but to clone someone in her image. McKay casts a searchlight on this "God-complex" sentimentality and Mrs. Craig's dangerous benevolence.

At the level of the biological metaphor, Mrs. Craig as Bitá's surrogate mother speaks to McKay's acute political awareness of the relationship in colonial discourse between territory and female as sites to be exploited. England as "the mother country," initiates a fourth factor in complication of the biological/surrogate mother triad, since she plays the double role of patriarch and matriarch to the feminized territory of Jamaica and by extension Jamaica's children including McKay. McKay's symbolic return to Jamaica

therefore disrupts the “project” that mothering means to the colonial benevolent and the absent/present English Empire.

In the manner in which he enters the text as female, McKay also shows how the idea of colonial mothering configures the folk as members of a bastard family, who are quietly exploited in the very manner in which they are deemed unfit to “bring up” or educate their own children. Through his surrogate persona’s story McKay demonstrates the continuing tradition of racist and stultifying paternalism that was perpetrated in the name of religion. As the narrator notes: “[The Craigs] were happy in praise-Godly humble way over their handiwork. The transplanted African peasant girl that they had transformed from brown wildling into a decorous cultivated young lady” (11). This is also their “daughter” who has been mothered too by “pioneers who preceded them in that field and whose tradition was the living breath of their work (11).

Mrs. Craig’s roles as father and mother come together here since what McKay does in disrupting this colonialist narrative is to throw Mrs. Craig’s identity as mother into obversion, so that we see her as a patriarch in drag, trying to trick the folk into thinking she is a woman under the mask of mother. Is this why she sleeps in a separate room from that of her husband Malcolm Craig and why she rushes to conceal this fact from Rosyanna the maid? The colonial authority is revealed as a trickster as well and it takes all the maroon’s guerilla skill to confound this counterfeit tricksterism of performed benevolence. McKay’s entrance in drag confounds Mrs. Craig’s identity as woman or mother because she is displaced by Bitá’s seizure of authority, and Bitá’s performance signifies upon this as the real homecoming.

McKay's spectacular entrance through Bita's body is an attempt to negotiate and reassign the love of his mother as a genuine figure of female authority not just in his life but also in his memory of her. Thus, his return is to find home in the absence of his mother. The construction of Bita around a mother triad: Bita's mother, and Priscilla Craig and Aunt Nommy as "mother figures" for Bita, fixes upon McKay's drag character a degree of complexity in the way he imagines his own mothering. It seems as if neither of these women (even though Aunt Nommy affects Bita in a far more personal way than Priscilla Craig) fully inhabits the role of surrogate properly for Bita. Aunty Nommy is still a nurturing figure in Banana Bottom when Bita returns there, but Bita is now a grown woman with needs that have developed with time and distance, that a mother, let alone a surrogate, cannot fill.

The death of McKay's mother chronologically initiated a series flight away from "home" that may be seen in his departure to the United States, then to England, and Russia and then Europe, and Morocco and culminating in his return to the United States, but not to Jamaica. The absence of a surrogate mother after his mother's death and the absence of a profound example in Bita's life in the novel seem to imply that this void was never filled. The death of Jordan Plant at the end of the novel and Bita's coupling with Jubban on the dray bearing his body may be read as a letting go, a profound acceptance of the porosity of the final border that the maroon had to cross, that between life and death. In his rehearsal of the legend of the maroon Makandal's death (*Kingdom of This World*) Carpentier tells of how at the moment the colonial authorities saw him perish in the flames, his people saw him rise in the fire reincarnated.

McKay's description of the coupling in religious terms not only rehearses the catalyzing moment of Bitá's return and embracing of her roots at the market in Jubilee, it also retrospectively satirizes Priscilla's sexual frigidity and recalls the fact that Bitá's authoritative decision to leave the mission was initiated as well by Mrs. Craig's response to her relationship with Hopping Dick. This relationship marked the onset of Bitá's sexual reawakening for though she never becomes intimate with Hopping Dick she finds him attractive at first and is willing to consider him as a possible mate; that is, she recognizes her sexual curiosity as a legitimate response and is not afraid to explore its possibilities. Ultimately though she realizes that Hopping Dick is not suitable. But the result is important:

Bitá knew that she was going to go [leave the mission]. She could not truthfully say that she was interested in the work of the mission. The profession of religion left her indifferent. She was skeptical about it – this religion that had been imposed upon and planted in her young mind (112).

Bitá's decision to leave the mission and reject the religious order for her life comes as no surprise if one appreciates the extent of her maroon character and performativity in this text. She is a rebel figure like McKay who seizes an authoritative persona that aids her threat to "break out one day with something that would destroy irreparably the whole fabric of the plan that had been carefully charted for her" (110). In one of her several moments of insurrection, she destroys the photograph of her English college that hung over her bed, ripping "it from the frame and [trampling] the pieces under her feet" (112). Bitá's actions demonstrate her coming into masculine authority; that is to say, a concretization of the impulse to declare a "certainty of self" (Forbes 220).

It is from this point that she actively challenges Mrs. Craig's plan for her life. What follows is an ensuing "battle" for control over Bita's body and her sexuality. Mrs. Craig is not interested in Bita's subjectivity as an independent adult individual and neither is she willing to accommodate Bita's humanity. She wants to close Bita off from the world of the folk, a world where according to her "sex was approached too easily" (16). More important, Mrs. Craig is afraid of Bita bearing a bastard under her roof. This would contaminate not only Bita's body but also hers, because Bita is "like her own daughter" (218) and her experiment would fail. In fact, Priscilla was deathly afraid too that Bita would "shame" her and forever ruin her. For Priscilla wanted a surrogate, reproductively capable body to own, in the same way the planter predicated his identity on the re/productive capacity of the slave as the engine of the capitalist plantation economy.

Bita complicates her maroon subjectivity by performing the "grotesque" in opposition to the dominance represented by and circulated through religion, her education, and sexuality. Bita seeks to deconstruct and question the justification or justice in the "already set terms that designates what is high and low" (Peter Stallybrass and Allon White 43). I have argued that by making her a representation of himself in drag, Bita/McKay revokes the borders of class and gender in order to "unsettle 'given' social positions and interrogate the rules of inclusion, exclusion and domination in the structure of the social ensemble" (Stallybrass and White 43). What this means is that as a maroon, Bita is not a "lady," "princess," "exhibit" or "experiment" because her maroon subjectivity resides beyond the realms of a singular discourse, as well as beyond construction by the Other. Because Bita is not a "pure" construction in this sense she is

able, until she decides to physically leave, to live with Mrs. Craig on the “plantation” and leave without leaving. Her maroon abilities assume a kind of power that is visible but invisible at the same time. This is seen in the strategies she uses to manipulate Hopping Dick to aid and abet her escape from the mission. Hopping Dick imagines that Bita’s attentions are proof of her love for him; Hopping Dick, the consummate performer, has no idea that he is being played: “So eloquent was Bita in her desire to go against the will of Mrs. Craig, her ardor so convincing, that Hopping Dick was certain she was in love with him and felt that the real affection had been sprung the night of the house party.” (213).

This example is very intriguing on a number of levels. It identifies Bita’s rebel consciousness: she wants to release herself from Mrs. Craig without enacting a full escape since at this point it suits her to be at the mission. In inviting Hopping Dick and being seen publicly with him, she is ignoring the “already set terms designating high and low” (Stallybrass and White, 43). By introducing Hopping Dick to the public as her companion and by declaring to Priscilla Craig that she likes Mr. Delgado, adding that she “could love him” (210) “Bita was determined to demonstrate to Mrs. Craig that she was of age to choose the friend she wanted” (213). Bita made sure “she was with Hopping Dick after church service. He met her at practice, at the market and always accompanied openly to the mission gate” (213). Bita is not interested in marrying Hopping Dick or falling in love with him. She uses him as the artifice, camouflage for initiating her departure from the Mission house. “Bita was certain that the time had arrived for her to face the fact of leaving Jubilee. It would be impossible for her to stay when she felt not only resentment but a natural opposition against Mrs. Craig” (211).

Underground, Bitá is charting a new plan, a new map for her life, one that does not include these two individuals even though they were in it. It is not surprising that while on their way back from the house party that Bitá snuck out of the mission to attend, Hopping Dick misses the significance of Bitá's response to his concern that he "wouldn't like to get her into trouble at the mission on account of him" (200). Bitá tells him "if anything untoward should occur she could always return to Banana Bottom" (200). Her response is underlined in maroon subterfuge, rebellion and stratagem, because she was able to show Hopping Dick without him seeing it that her departure does not include him: "And leabe we all! An' what would Jubilee be widouten you Miss Bitá?" (200). The rest of the conversation and the time between the two shed light on Bitá's underground plan to leave the "plantation." The performance is hinged on her ability to make Hopping Dick, like Mrs. Craig, believe that she is his, while she realigns the balance of power so that she makes the decisions about the conditions affecting her agency and subjectivity. And she performs submission, acquiescence, and passive resistance as part of her arsenal of underground resistance: "Bitá yielded up herself entirely for a moment, limber in his arms. Then brusquely she disengaged herself and ran through the limes leading up the back way to the mission" (201). Thus, Bitá can be seen in a moment of double drag performance, as McKay returned as Bitá in "woman version."³⁷ The performance is riveting in its hilarity and the demeanor of calm respectability with which the narrator effects it. That Bitá manages to play this kind of lady-likeness, with what must have been quite a shocking impropriety for a woman of her "status," evinces both skill and daring.

³⁷ I borrow the phrase from the title of Evelyn O'Callaghan's book, *Woman Version: Theoretical Approaches to West Indian Fiction by Women*.

Given that Hopping Dick is usually the one fooling women, Bitá's action here again shows her seizing masculine authority at the expense of the male.

The part of Bitá's performance that is visible is the part that she deliberately places in front of Mrs. Craig's eyes. In fact the camouflaged approach to Hopping Dick along with the open playing before Mrs. Craig suggests she was hoping Mrs. Craig would evict her from the mission, even as Banjo had hit on a plan to get himself deported. Certainly, though, the series of insurrections Bitá initiates are made clearly evident to Mrs. Craig in order to identify the basis for her rebellion; that is, she demonstrates in her actions that she has the technologies of marronage to wage her own battle in plain sight of and proximity to the symbolic plantation. Thus, when Bitá, on one of her visits with Rosyanna to the market, ignores the latter's request to leave with her and gallivants with Hopping Dick all over town, then allows him to accompany her back to the mission gate, making sure he lingers there for a spell, she was "quite aware that Mrs. Craig was looking at them from the veranda" (216).

Bitá is marking territory by showing that her body and mind are now completely in her possession and she is now ready to wage war if she is prevented from leaving the "plantation" on her own terms. And when Priscilla comments that, "I have brought up a bird to pick out my eye" (216) she acknowledges the authoritative seizure of power Bitá has enacted in this public display of resistance and rebellion. The phrasing is quite hilarious because it is a Jamaican proverbial folk phrasing that demonstrates the unobserved psychic breach by which Bitá and the folkways of expression have infiltrated the colonial system. Later when Bitá enters the physical compound of the mission and demands her lunch from the maid, Rosyanna, who is now angry with Bitá and who

reprimands her because she has “transgressed,” Bitá “gave Rosyanna a sharp slap in the face, crying, ‘That will teach you to hold your dirty tongue’” (217).

Eventually Bitá’s timely and strategically orchestrated insurrections culminate in the physical homecoming by which she returns to Banana Bottom and marries her father’s drayman Jubban already pregnant with the child conceived on top of her father’s coffin as they were returning with his remains for burial. At this point she fully inhabits a maroon rebel consciousness that is echoed in the song she remembers soon after her first insurrection at the mission house: “Just going to do the thing that I want,/No matter who don’t like it” (219). The language Bitá employs to articulate her rebel consciousness comes not from her education overseas, but from the folk art and this is consistent with her methodology of resistance which is also from below. Eventually, her marriage to Jubban--an act that she, rather than Jubban seems to initiate--is a marriage to the folk as well.

There is a sense too in which the marriage to Jubban rehearses but also amplifies the breach made by her sexual relations with Crazy Bow. Crazy Bow, I have said, is the creative force in the village, the embodiment of creolizations, both from his racial composition and his artistic abilities. He extends Bitá, the artistically inclined intellectual, who eventually adopts this creole subjectivity through her education in England. Crazy Bow’s impact on Bitá’s consciousness is critical: she was attracted to him because he lacks the singularity of vision and expression that would have tied him to one way of being. Artistically, he is an exciting figure to her fledgling intellectual curiosity: he is unattached to place or space and is continually being invited into but also being driven out of spaces. Crazy Bow’s fugitive, vagabond, existence is partly the result of people’s

enchantment and fear, for he not only inhabits spaces with his music, he also inhabits those around him. Thus, the sexual encounter is not a rape as McKay provocatively and ambiguously describes it (there is no suggestion that the experience was traumatic),³⁸ but it is symbolically an embrace of two artistic forces caught in a combusive motion in the universe. Crazy Bow is that “chaotic” force of creativity. Crazy Bow is described as “strange” and “crazy,” and he is accepted as harmlessly insane by members of the community. In fact, they are confounded by his genius and have no clue what to do with it or him because he is excessive, bursting out of borders, (con)texts and definitions. He is Creole. He is maroon:

Crazy Bow could play. Every fiddler in and around Banana Bottom called him master. Those who had been to the city and heard a little high music said he was a virtuoso. The schoolmaster called him a colored Paganini. And the Rev. Malcolm, who kept up the family tradition of appraising native accomplishments, said, when he heard Crazy Bow play, that he was a sinful, drinking lunatic but a great musician” (8).

It is only another artist –type who can really “see” Crazy Bow and recognize his greatness. Bita does not laugh at the idea of greatness in Crazy Bow and this leads to the doing of the “deed” which propels Crazy Bow’s erasure (disappearance from the text) and Bita’s ascension. What is the meaning of this act of cancelling? What is the meaning of Crazy Bow’s excess? Crazy Bow’s cancelling and his excess must give way to Bita’s greater, more accomplished enigma –(self) regulated yet wild, authoritatively masculine

³⁸ McKay’s use of the term rape was possibly a satirical reference to its statutory meaning which is “sex with a girl who is below the age of consent.” His satirical commentary would be seen in the irony of the whole story because Bita is the one who initiated the “sex act.” Yet, McKay had been a policeman in Jamaica and so would have been well versed in such matters of the law.

yet arcanelly feminine (feminine here meaning mysterious, unknown quantity that may at any moment insurrect as the fuel beneath new and more dazzling displays of masculine subjectivity). But also Crazy Bow had to leave because if he was the old McKay, the new McKay is a traveled, educated other maroon.

In conclusion then, Bita Plant, though a product of a colonial society, is a modern mosaic of rural and cosmopolitan nuances in a community where ambiguous multiplicities abound and where, as Benítez Rojo would put it, to be Caribbean means to exist “a certain kind of way” (4). Thus, Bita returns to her community with an even more textured subjectivity (much like McKay’s) than the subjectivity with which she left. Like the men in *Banjo*, Bita yearns for a mode of expression that does not numb her senses as an intellectual, social, sexual, or cultural being. Bita is the Caribbean self in marronage and she must negotiate these complexities to re-chart new routes for her journey around the influences of colonial and religious autocracy. From the moment of her return to the island she engages in a tightrope walk of defiance towards that end. Bita’s tightrope experience tests some of the tensions within Jamaican and, by extension, Caribbean culture but she successfully presents an alternative world view composed of hybrid epistemologies that will allow her to comfortably negotiate the world of and beyond Banana Bottom. Simply put, what Bita does is to trouble the lines of vision that oversee the definitions of sexuality, gender subjectivities, power, and individual autonomy. Ultimately, McKay projects onto this female protagonist a number of seeming contradictions, to borrow Carolyn Cooper’s idea. These “seeming contradictions: erudition/ignorance, civilization/savagery, fragmentation/wholeness, foreign/native” (Cooper 46) underscore the very essence of McKay’s project which is the difficulty of

“imposing a single meaning on a set of complex cultural circumstances” (Cooper 46). This is the complexity that informs the return of McKay as Bitá Plant in this narrative. His return in this guise challenges some of the criticisms that were entertained by some that he failed to give complex portraits to the women in his texts.³⁹

Banana Bottom is a novel of resistance, an ultimate maroon tour du force invested with characters and representations of life that seek to imagine an alternative methodology and cosmology against the closed colonial systems and worldviews that conditioned the consciousness and life of Black Jamaica. McKay believed that any impetus to change could not come from an outside force, but must come from the local man and woman who live the life of the folk. Consequently, this novel is as much about self-articulation as it is about the “necromancy of language” (Boehmer, 108). *Banana Bottom* is also about the beginnings of a collective consciousness that is aimed at re-charting the terrain of colonial privilege.

Ultimately, What McKay’s novel signifies on is the idea that “from the early twentieth century the virtual white monopoly on imperial writing was being broken. Europeans steadily and surely lost the sole charge of the pen that colonial privilege had for years guaranteed as theirs” (Boehmer 96). Here is an occasion for speaking which McKay uses to reveal the clash, merging, and conversation of “two different modes of discourse” which in fact “asserted the right of [the writer/speaker] to conceive of [the] land on [her] terms; that is to represent what [s/he] claimed as her own, to invent independently, to take narrative and also political command” (Boehmer, 99). One must

³⁹ See for example Hazel Carby’s “Policing the Black Woman’s Body in an Urban Context:” Hathaway, *Caribbean Waves*; Banks, “Representations of Vernacular Culture: Women as Culture Bearers in the Works of Claude McKay;” Knadler, “Domestic Violence in the Harlem Renaissance;” and Saito, “Gendered Negritude, Women’s Representation and the novels of Claude McKay and Jean Rhys.”

see this act also as an insurrection against a plantation psychology and interpret its event as a maroon act of flight from the colonial authority and also as a public “demand for the independence to interpret its modernity” (Boehmer 97). Therefore, McKay, his novel *Banana Bottom* and ultimately his female heroine, Bitia Plant, must be seen as a deviant turn in colonial and Western traditions. First, he promotes a native Caribbean/colonial heroine to the center of the novel at a time when this was not a popular practice and second flees from his own male “skin” to emerge as a female/woman in this text. These two risks are significant in taking note of a new nationalist sentiment (that prefigures the fervor of independence in Jamaica and the Caribbean). In addition, McKay’s flight and the ultimate risk in this act, signals a constituent aspect of his character, life, and writing, which is his existence outside of, away from, and foreign to the systems and values of writing that ideologues prescribed for Western cultures.

CONCLUSION

As we have demonstrated, Claude McKay promotes his texts as modern narratives about the search to define a manhood that is not predicated on replicating, exchanging or conquering a home space but more on a search for a home in a transnational or international black diasporic experience. McKay uses his characters to challenge the meanings or interpretations of masculinity as a static homogenous or hegemonic entity. He portrays the movements of his characters in spaces that have the nature of a “maroon” enclave and these spaces become for them zones of resistance, refuge, freedom, and reinvention; spaces where each of them has opportunities to play himself as a cosmopolitan and insurgent male (or in the case of Bitia Plant herself) different but same, visible and invisible, imagined and real all at the same time. These binaries brought into problematized relations are natural to the maroon existence and play upon the improvisatory techniques that, like in a jazz ensemble, characters must improvise to give meaning to their lives.

In this light, there are certain ambiguous tendencies that may be seen in the way these men and women, as maroon inhabitants, corrupt, challenge and manage negotiated subjectivities that resist some of the stereotypes attached to black identity during the 1920’s, 30’s and 19th century Jamaica. As such, these city spaces and the rural landscapes seen through the eyes of McKay’s protagonists demonstrate that these locations are burgeoning diasporic cultural and political zones. In these spaces, it’s the inhabitants contest publicly and privately as trans-cultural, a-national and transnational bodies, who meet and engage in interior and exterior dialogues about race, nation, class, gender and

sexuality. This experience is what affects the maroon experience and provides a commentary on black masculinities as they are derived and explored through the various maroon types seen in McKay's novels. Thus, a new social discourse surrounding the black diasporic reality of McKay's characters germinates out of such maroon inflected existence.

By emphasizing a new social discourse, born from the introduction of and use of codes and practices that rearrange both the public and private spaces, one can conclude that there has to be an enormous shift in how modernity, transnationality, race and gender were being negotiated during the interwar period and the cultural movement described as the Harlem Renaissance. Further, the desire to implicate a new way of seeing black subjectivities is perceived through this new social discourse that McKay inserts as part of the epistemological foundation of *Home to Harlem*, *Banjo* and *Banana Bottom*. Ultimately, one must see in these texts, the various ways in which McKay's novels defy genre tradition and abort the teleological motif for plot structure and meaning long before the advent of the modernist or postmodernist novel. This abandonment of tradition seems to give him greater freedom and creative powers to recreate a maroon atmosphere in his novels and help him configure the prevailing social conditions that his maroon characters inhabit. McKay's free literary spirit is part of his maroon initiative against and away from the conservative literary expectations of the time. This free literary spirit also gives him the opportunity to focus on and unravel for his readers a panoramic African diasporic discourse directed by a burgeoning African diasporic population. The Bitas of Jamaica's colonial era and the Jakes, Rays, and Banjos of the 1920's, though consumed by racial markers and challenged by social boundaries are characters whose migrations in and out

of various geographical, cultural and gendered zones highlight the complexities and contradictions inherent in the production of resistant bodies, not bound by all the usual markers of race and class.

It is through McKay's free spirit, both as a writer and a "vagabond," that representations of these characters, Bita, Jake, Ray or Banjo alongside the organic realms in Banana Bottom, Harlem or Marseilles produce ambiguous and, in some instances, very offensive deeds. Notably, the ways in which these characters are challenging what McKay himself describes as the "systemic beliefs about identity, performance and sex" (Beinecke, Box 38). Because of McKay's desire to be seen as a writer and not a Negro writer, his novels demonstrate an aggressive critique of race and, ultimately class, two divisive issues that tempered the performative gestures and political actions of many black intellectuals, political leaders and writers during the interwar period. Thus, his characters are creations who are as restless as he; they search for home as much as they engage in a vagabond enterprise; they are mysteries as much as they are challenges. In effect, McKay's men and women are human beings whose lives mirror the complexity of race both as a social construct and a hegemonic disciplinary mark.

However, McKay's characters use their complex subject positions as fertile spots to manifest maroon diversions that do not consider what whites or blacks might think or expect about the roles or function of blackness. Therefore, McKay's compositions, as presented in these novels, invite a new debate about the black Atlantic and the meaning of the African diaspora. This debate seeks to revise the meanings of black identities into more nuanced and textured definitions. Such definitions challenge, not just the role of the black intellectual during the Harlem Renaissance, but also the construction, performance,

ethics, and condition of blacks within the larger human experience. While McKay is not the first person to give voice to this particular class of individuals within the United States social context, he designs his characters as propagandistic paradigms to challenge the dogma of the “Talented Tenth” that were being pushed by the self-proclaimed leader of the black intelligentsia, W.E.B. Du Bois. McKay’s attention to the “lower frequencies” ultimately enables him to record the contributions of marginalized characters who invent narratives that form an integral part of the performance lore of American expression through Music, Literature, and Art. And, as a precursor to the Négritude movement, McKay’s characters seek to claim black realities, culture and sensibility with pride and dignity. McKay’s treatment, therefore, confirms as Léopold Sédar Senghor’s suggests he was at the forefront of the Négritude Movement and his novels are canvases that showcase an unforgiving pride in black culture and identity.

Such that one sees this creative spirit fueling McKay’s creation, I claim that it is necessary to read *Home to Harlem*, *Banjo* and *Banana Bottom* as texts that deliberately attempt to mimic black life and culture, that they are texts that show how the class of men and women McKay documents speak from the Ellisonian lower frequencies, and are the significant “others” who ostensibly “frighten” some of the Black Intellectuals of the day with the sounds, shades and expressions of their own Blackness. This Blackness from these “lower frequencies,” the jook joints, the cabarets, the rent parties, the tea meetings, the markets, the streets and neighborhoods in which various migrant populations of blacks mingle was simplified by such “midwives” of the race and class, as idolatrous creations for white specularization. Yet, one must note that these men and women are actually early incarnations of Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, whose vision resounds

profoundly in McKay's texts. By using marronage and creolization to critique the representations of black realms prevalent in the Interwar period, McKay shows how Bitá, Ray and Banjo speak from this lower frequency for and about us, blacks and whites and those in between. Used in this appraisal of black life, the term "lower frequency" is apropos because it is a provocative metaphor that not only addresses the issue of space and identity but also performance. The term also signifies upon the maroon experience in how it represents the movement, a deliberate and voluntary one, to a location that offers personal freedom and creativity. Ironically, even though the implications of the term suggest marginality, it is self-consciously and mockingly asserting "empowerment" as is evidenced in Bitá's actions against Priscilla Craig's hegemony or Banjo's strategies against French racist practices in the city of Marseilles. And these examples provide some of the evidence of a maroon subjectivity that is organic and political at the same time.

Consequently, McKay succeeds in teasing out the psychosocial and cultural complexities of his characters through their deliberate representation as maroon cosmopolites⁴⁰ who mark their spaces with performance styles that "act out" the meanings of diaspora. The meanings of terms African or Black within the diaspora goes beyond a celebration of difference and, by using this frame of marronage, I seek to extend and complicate Ifeoma Nwanko, Michelle Ann Stephens and Ross Posnock's deliberations about black cosmopolitanism. The modern subject in McKay's days

⁴⁰ This term comes from Ross Posnock's essay "The Dream of Deracination: The Uses of Cosmopolitanism" where he discusses what he sees as the revival of cosmopolitanism as something useful in thinking beyond the celebration of difference. He goes on to add that "rather than preoccupied with opposition and exclusion, cosmopolitanism regards culture as public property and nurtures the capacity for appropriation as a tool for the excluded to attain access to a social order of democratic equality." (804). In this manner, McKay uses cosmopolitanism to give his characters the ability to attain varying levels of democracy in various public realms.

struggled to choose between identity and difference, race and nation; however, in these texts, McKay refused these choices. His novels, by denying such Manichean choices, serve to deepen the debate around the identity of blacks in the diaspora, a place where they are not always challenged by exclusion and conflict. My study of these novels demonstrates that the term “identity” does not satisfy the complex trends, debates and meditations that were taking place during the 1920s and 30s. And, thus, my use of the term subjectivity instead of identity is to capture the contradictions, oppositions, tensions, and relationalities practiced within the black community, especially against the echoes of slavery and modern racist stereotypes that consistently play out in the lives of these diasporic human beings.

McKay’s descriptions of the city in his first two novels and then of a rural community in his third one, *Banana Bottom*, is an attempt in my estimation, to draw a map of black diasporic citizenship based on representing blackness both as a rejection of and an interrogation of whiteness as an hegemonic regime whose historiography includes the migration, forced and other, of blacks within and without their “homes.” Important to this mapping are the ways in which the application of the frame marronage shows his characters, with all their shortcomings and foibles, rebel against the fixity of blackness. Even if this rigid fixity is to ostracize and marginalize other blacks, migrant and poor, from claiming the diversity and complexity available within the black diasporic community, McKay’s diasporan citizens, through the amplificatory medium of performance, create self-referential subjectivities that exceed the oppositional frames of rejection and interrogation. In this manner, his novels contemplate and formulate an anterior consciousness of blackness that suggests frames for understanding the emergence

and shape of the very convoluted political and cultural expression that is *Négritude*. As a movement, *Négritude*, especially, represents a useful commentary on the broadening political scope inherent in African diasporic subjectivity and culture. *Négritude*, which began only at the end of the Harlem Renaissance, must therefore be understood as encouraged by McKay's depiction of black arts in his texts and his unapologetic observance of black culture, whether moving or still, as theatre.

Indeed, McKay's characters, especially Jake, Ray, Banjo and Bitá Plant, negotiate their environments by moving in and out of their various social spaces, Harlem, Marseilles, or Banana Bottom, like modern day maroons. The subsequent discussions that emerge about this movement signify upon the tenuous relationship between geography and memory, identity and environment, home and belonging, nation and citizenship. These are some of the tensions that implicate both marronage and creolization as active ingredients fueling the imagination and subjectivities of denizens of the black Atlantic and specifically black males. Using marronage and creolization as paradigms to examine the presentation of black masculinities in McKay's texts reinforces my attempt to provide other ways of reading some of the ideological underpinnings of black male representation, especially at a time during the 1920's when Negro's political opinion, scholarship, and expression were driven by "Race men" such as Marcus Garvey, A. Phillip Randolph, W.E. B. DuBois, and Alain Locke, to name a few.

Black masculinity was no less important in this struggle as most of the arbitrators of black identity were middle class men whose attempts to mobilize blacks emerged from their own personal need to nominate themselves as citizens, especially as many had been educated in the less racist and more sympathetic North. The racism of the South and the

threat of lynching made the northern cities melting pots for black culture and, for many who came, it was an escape from the harsh conditions of Southern racism to the promise of a better life. The call for US Negro soldiers during World War I increased their presence overseas and encouraged more Blacks to seek life “over there” working and living, especially finding the living conditions in Europe less abrasive than those in the United States. The presence of other blacks, men and women from the French West Indies, Africa and the Middle East living in Paris and Marseilles made the appeal of these metropolises even greater in the minds of blacks who went to live overbroad.

Moreover, in a US context, black manhood was linked to nation and was more forcefully so during the 1920's, because it needed to recover a “broken” and “besieged” black body, maimed by the discriminatory practices of Reconstruction and Jim Crow. The mass exodus from the South was also associated with the trickling of blacks overseas as men and women, but mostly black men, moved to the North and to European cities to find work, improve and save their lives. Thus, a black male maroon consciousness engendered a specific black diasporic urban poetics, steeped in cosmopolitan sensibilities, creolization processes, and acts of marronage. For me, McKay's characters are “modern maroons” crossing or moving from one environment to another, performing complex tightrope acts that reflect the itinerancy of the black experience. During this time, black leadership was in fact black manhood on show and other black men who were educated were considered “orphaned” illegitimate, diseased, and clearly a problem for upper middle class black men, the default arbitrators of black identity. In their attempts to mobilize blacks were their own personal needs to enter the nation, and promote the black male as equal (as middle class white men), not different, and definitely not a “nigger.”

After the Negro riots of 1917 in East St. Louis and New York and those in the summer of 1919, black men especially those of the lower class particular became “problems” in the psyche of “white” and middle class black. In essence, they became “niggers” and their subjectivity drove the restless and hysterical nature of cultural relations between whites and blacks in the white metropolis of the North. What was even more dramatic was that this group represented an underclass. This confrontation, I argue, involved a new sense of black masculine behavior that had rebellion, bravado, guerilla warfare, and political will driving its engine. Here indeed is the maroon voice speaking as a class of blacks who insist upon their representation within the nation. In other words, the Negro riots were about manhood, black manhood, but they were also fundamentally a revolt against a culture and aesthetic that made the “nigger” a constant image of depredation, unable to see man, father, or son, an even less president in himself.

McKay’s maroon portraits are in revolt against the culture of “the black problem,” the sense that they are always “niggers.” Their actions emphasize this repudiation of the cultural prognostication of fear and shame within the black community. Resulting from this cultural condition is the affirmation that black masculine identity is dependent on white male approval or as seen in *Banana Bottom*, white female approval. Members of the Black Intelligentsia and those who assumed leadership on behalf of the black race, sought to “rescue” black identity, i.e. black manhood, from this “nigger” subjectivity because of their fear the image, more than the word “nigger,” imposed shame and suspicion on all blacks, middle class and lower class alike. Yet, my argument is that McKay’s depiction of his characters sought to shed light on precisely this, that the Black Intelligentsia were more interested in rescuing this “nigger” subjectivity from Western

cultural and political discourse because to them, the destiny of the race was tied to the destiny of the black man, and this could not be left in the hands of “niggers.” Therefore, the very texture of McKay’s novels, with their maroon, creole, crossover poetics and subjectivities, could not have been fully understood in the Manichean politics of this historically divided debate.

Indeed, McKay’s works reflect the condition of migrant maroons who attempt to use the act of flight and return (if it happens) to demonstrate how their knowledge is a nuanced concept of the world, of its laws, its economy and that world’s political and cultural practices. In other words, what is at stake here is the status of the migrant whose actions and whose subjectivities echo anthropologist Franz Boaz’s idea that the “outsider is no longer a person without rights, whose life and property are lawful prey of any one who can conquer him” (228). Thus, the acts of the migrant maroon characters are framed in “tightrope walking” as well in the symbolic gestures of their flights from spaces of oppression. Moreover, the movement away from these oppressive sites is what initiates these characters as tightrope walkers, a series of balancing acts, incursions and escapes that eventually birth the maroon self, one whose struggles, stories, conflicts and movements highlight Antonio Benitez Rojo’s “a certain kind of way” in which that same maroon figure uses the process of creolization to (per)form his/her subjectivities. Jake’s flight from World War I and Ray’s flight to Europe, or Bitá’s flight from the mission house to Banana Bottom, should be observed as this risk taking, born out of the murky politics and heavy burden that is placed on the meaning of blackness by the nation state. Thus, the meanings of citizenship, home, and nation are at the heart of this study because they formulate a critical foundation upon which new meanings for black masculine

subjectivities, especially during the period of the Harlem Renaissance and the interwar period, can be built.

Here I use the theory of marronage and creolization to introduce the singularity and insularity of the term New Negro and why, as maroons, McKay's men are to be seen as the real New Negroes. Also, McKay is a "jazzman" who understood the intricacies of African music and the role music played in the life of the people of the blues and the spirituals. Thus, he adopts the style of a jazz narrative representing characters who reflect the illogicality and complexity of modernity. In looking at how these men perform in a jazz inflected maroon experience, I determined how McKay's male characters per(form) with improvisatory techniques their black masculinities as a challenge, not a problem.

In essence, my argument sought to unpack the ways in which these novels demonstrate how McKay's men as "maroons" interact on what I term the "lower frequencies" because these characters speak as the collective "you" from the underground or below ground. These crucial realities – creolization – is what some critics describe as vulgar and uncharacteristic of black culture, something that Caribbean intellectual Antonio Benitez Rojo calls "plantation dynamics." McKay's novels reflect a version of Rojo's plantation dynamics because he shows that the instability that comes with creolization is a product of the plantation, a place that is the "womb of his otherness – and globality...the bifurcated center that exists inside and outside at the same time, near to and distant from all things that I can understand as my own: race, nationality, language, and religion" (2)

For me, McKay's focus on this class of individuals in its state of migration and creolized sensibilities gives him an opportunity to examine his own psychological

marronage. We saw that, in fact, the character Ray who is introduced in *Home to Harlem* and who later returns in *Banjo*, is obviously McKay's alter ego. Through Ray, McKay thus able to wrestle control of the narrative from his fictional protagonist and speak in an autobiographical tone so as to make sense of his own hybrid cultural journeying and make that of his characters even more realistic. Needless to say, McKay borrowed his fictional motives from the realism of his own experiences in Harlem, Marseilles and Jamaica. But, in addition, McKay's only female protagonist Bitia Plant is also in my opinion another version of himself, this time in drag, literary drag. This final novel, *Banana Bottom*, is a narrative of return in two ways. First, it is a narrative of return for him because McKay never physically returned to his homeland after his departure and traveled around the world and, second, it is narrative of return for the character Bitia Plant who is sent abroad to be "civilized" but who returns to the island even more hungry for her folk roots.

In conclusion, these three texts form a triptych of works that scrutinize the writer's most challenging questions about his search for home and his desire to reconcile the warring identities and the polemic question that surrounded the issues of class in the black community and indeed in his own intellectual life. McKay's final novel *Banana Bottom* was his attempt to solve this issue and confront his bisexuality, not as problems in his life but as routes that he did explore during his own marronage in and outside of Jamaica and the United States. Thus, Bitia's presence in his final novel as female and both as folk and intellectual is an epiphany of sorts whereby McKay pays homage to the dualities, contradictions and creolizations evident in his discourse on the African diaspora and extends the boundaries of black masculinities.

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VITA

EDUCATION

- January 2011** **Ph.D. in American Studies** College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia.
- May 1999** **M.A. in Literature, Clark University, Worcester, MA.**
Major subject: Contemporary African American Literature and Culture.
Minor subjects: American Literature and Caribbean Literature.
- May 1997** **B.A. in English Literature,** University of the West Indies, Mona, Kingston, Jamaica.
- 1989-1992** **Teacher Training Program,** Mico Teachers' College, Kingston, Jamaica.
Studied teaching pedagogy, curriculum development and planning, techniques in starting and sustaining discussions and use of Instructional Technology in the classroom.

DISSERTATION TOPIC

“Black Masculinities as Marronage: Claude McKay’s Representations of Black Male Subjectivities in Metropolitan Spaces”

Dissertation Director: Professor Lynn Weiss

In my dissertation, I apply the Caribbean cultural term maroonage as a theoretical tool to highlight how black masculine subjectivities are re-shaped in the diasporic cityscapes of Claude McKay’s novels. The kinds of negotiations implicit or explicit in the actions of McKay’s characters highlight particular anxieties that arise when they either migrate, flee to, or search for home. McKay’s characters, I suggest, are depicted with subjectivities far more textured than critics of the Harlem Renaissance have allowed. Just as McKay’s novels help to deconstruct essentialized notions of blackness, they also show how migration and flight deconstruct notions of home for the diasporic subject. Thus, the dissertation argues that these characters are ultimately tightrope walkers who balance between the challenges of leaving one home-space and living in another, albeit a larger and more cosmopolitan one.

PUBLICATIONS

“Masculinity and Dancehall.” *Caribbean Quarterly* 45.1 (1999): pp 1-16.

CONFERENCE PAPERS

“The Politics of Place: Examining the Treatment of Space in one Poem of Elizabeth Bishop and one by Derek Walcott”
The NEMLA Conference, Baltimore, Maryland, March 1998.

“Looking for (a) Man: The Cases of Richard Wright’s Bigger Thomas (Native Son) and Ernest Gaines’ Jefferson (A Lesson Before Dying)”
The American Studies Graduate Student Conference, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA, January 26, 2002.

“Who dis, Who Dat?: Mapping Michael Thelwell’s Rhygin as a ‘star’ in The Harder They Come.”

The 9th International “Culture and Power” Conference, University of Lisbon, Portugal, November 4 – 7, 2003.

“Tightrope Walk and the Negotiation of Black Cosmopolitanisms”

The 19th Annual AYA Graduate Student Spring Conference, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA, April 11-12, 2008.

“The Maroon Intellectual: Reading Some of Claude McKay’s Personal Correspondences.” Evolutionary Momentum in African American Studies, Clark University, Worcester, MA, February 27 – 28, 2009.

“Weh Eye Nuh See, Heart Nuh Leap”: Claude McKay’s Literary Drag Performance in Banana Bottom,” Conference on Black Masculinities, University of North Carolina, Greensboro campus. October 14-16, 2010.

GUEST LECTURES/COLLOQUIA

“Black Masculinity in African American Literature,” Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, Psychology Department. June 15, 2000.

Black Masculinities as Marronage: The Representation of Black Male Subjectivities in Metropolitan Spaces, Clark University, Department of English. February 17, 2010

“Weh Eye Nuh See, Heart Nuh Leap”: Claude McKay’s Literary Drag Performance in Banana Bottom, College of the Holy Cross, Department of English, April 29, 2010

TEACHING AND RESEARCH INTERESTS

Caribbean Literature and Culture; African Diasporic Literature and Culture; Contemporary African American Literature and Culture; Black Masculinity Studies, Cultural Studies.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

2009 – present Lecturer, English Department, College of the Holy Cross

2007-2009 Consortium for Faculty Diversity Fellow and Lecturer, Bowdoin College.

Taught one section each year of “Migrant Narratives: Selected Writers from the Caribbean,” a first year seminar on Caribbean Literature examining the issue of emigration in selected novels.

2005 – 2007 Teacher, Mercersburg Academy, Mercersburg, PA.

Taught secondary school courses in college preparatory composition, literary and other textual analysis, and film analysis. Taught a senior seminar: “Writers of the Harlem Renaissance.”

1999-2001 Teacher, Pomfret School, Pomfret, CT.

Taught secondary school students in composition writing, public speaking, comprehension, and textual analysis.

1997-1998 Teaching Assistant (also responsible for several lectures to the class), Clark University.

- English 184: American Poetry;
 English 275: Literature of the Black America, Part I;
 English 120: Introduction to Shakespeare.
- 1998** **Graduate Instructor, Clark University.**
 IDND 18: Literature and Composition [was solely responsible for
 creating and teaching this writing-intensive literature seminar].
- 1992-1996** **Teacher, Wolmer's Boys' School, Kingston, Jamaica.**
 Taught secondary school students, in composition and textual analysis.

HONORS AND AWARDS

Consortium for Faculty Diversity Pre-Dissertation Fellow & Lecturer,
 Bowdoin College, 2007-2009.
 Bowdoin Faculty Summer Research Award, Bowdoin College, July
 2008.
 Research Assistant to Prof. Cindy Hahamovitch, History Department,
 William and Mary, Summer 2003 & 2004.
 American Studies Department Summer Research Grant, William and
 Mary, 2002.

DEPARTMENTAL SERVICE AND COMMITTEE WORK

- 2008-2009** Working Group on Faculty Diversity, Bowdoin College.
- 1997-1998** Graduate Student Representative on the Clark University Graduate
 Policy Committee.

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Modern Languages Association
 International Cultural Studies Association
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